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COVER: Briefly awakened from cryosuspension, Aesha Devora encounters her soul mate on board the sleepship in Pete Manison's "Let Sleep Not Divide Us" on page 58. Illustration by Broeck Steadman. ABOVE: Artist Chris Moore can make his devices seem blueprints for tomorrow, as in his image of a future docking at a space station. See Gallery on page 70.

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Dear Mr. Edelman:

I would like to compliment you on a fine magazine. I have enjoyed every issue. I would like, however, to correct a statement made in your September 1994 issue. In Frederik Pohl's essay, he stated "A Newton is the standard scientific unit of mass. Through a happy coincidence, it turns out to be just about the mass of an average apple."

A Newton is a unit of force, not mass. A Newton is equivalent to 0.225 pounds, which is about the *weight* of an average apple. The SI (International Standard of Units) unit of mass is the kilogram (kg) which is roughly the mass of a bag of apples.

Unfortunately, we have confused things by using the kg instead of the Newton to weigh our groceries. This works only on planet Earth. When we colonize the Moon and other planets, we will need to weigh our groceries in other units of measure (perhaps kilograms, lunar?).

Thank you for a wonderful magazine. It's the first magazine to which I have (gasp!) renewed a subscription.

Linda Cotrell

Dear Scott,

Your editorial in the July issue struck a particularly resonant chord with me—it is reminiscent of a half-dozen or so editorials I wrote as editor of *Starlog* and *Future* magazines. I was a strong proponent of the space program and the manned exploration of the solar system. So I find your desire to witness a manned landing on Mars entirely understandable. But try not to be too disappointed in the human race if it doesn't happen. It will not be for lack of courage, but rather as a result of changing priorities.

Human society does write its own future, as you suggest. The science-fictional dreams of nineteenth and early twentieth century authors helped give life and purpose to the space program, and we lived to see humanity taking its first baby steps up and out of the gravity well. But the engine driving the space program was—literally—the result of another dream from another time and place.

When the Chinese invented gunpowder, they used it for spectacular displays of celebratory fireworks. They could not have foreseen at the time how the uses of this invention would evolve through the centuries. But its direct descendants include the handgun, the howitzer, the V-2, and ultimately, the engines that drove the *Saturn* V and the Apollo astronauts to the Moon.

Likewise, it is difficult to predict the evolution of the latest engine driving social change—the computer. The sweet irony here is that computer technology, a direct development of the space program, is taking us in totally new directions: virtual reality and genetic manipulation being two of the more high-profile ones.

Our tools are changing; our dreams are changing. And our vision of the future is being rewritten. Space exploration is a valid expression of the poetic soul of humanity, but it is not the only one. Let us rejoice in the fecundity of the human spirit and the rich diversity of its expression.

Life *is* science fiction when viewed with the proper perspective. The fun is in trying to predict which of our collective dreams pop into reality and propel us into new territories: Will we fulfill Gibson's dark prophesy of a degraded cyberpunk society, or Pohl's daring cyber-genetic Man Plus experiments, or something entirely different?

The only thing I know for certain is the next change *will* occur in our lifetimes.

Howard Zimmerman

Dear Editors:

I was especially moved by the story "Red Dreams" in the November issue. The use of simile and other writing techniques is superb and the style is excellent. The real reason I like this story, however, is the possibility.

In some ways it was classically science fiction, but in others, it was all too likely. I fear for America's space program even more than does the author of the piece—not that it will die out, but that it's already dead.

I am a member of the National Space Society and subscribe to *Ad Astra*. I made a small donation, but I don't really think it will do any good—the American people seem to have given up. I still have the hope of going to space someday, traveling among the stars, but I'm afraid that it is a dream becoming ever more distant. The sad thing is what we're missing: the possibility.

Jason Schissel

Dear Editor:

I have been reading science fiction magazines for the past thirty years. Many of these magazines are defunct. Your *Science Fiction Age* is, in my opinion, better than the rest. The movie, television, editorials, and interviews are superb. I even enjoy your ads. Also, the high quality of the production is much appreciated. Many of your predecessors were produced on cheap newsprint that either smeared or yellowed with age. Thanks for producing such a quality work!

Eric L. Anderson

Readers—please let us know how we're doing at: Letters to the Editor, Science Fiction Age, *P. O. Box 369, Damascus, MD 20872.*

SCIENCE FICTION AGE

VOLUME 3 **NUMBER 2**

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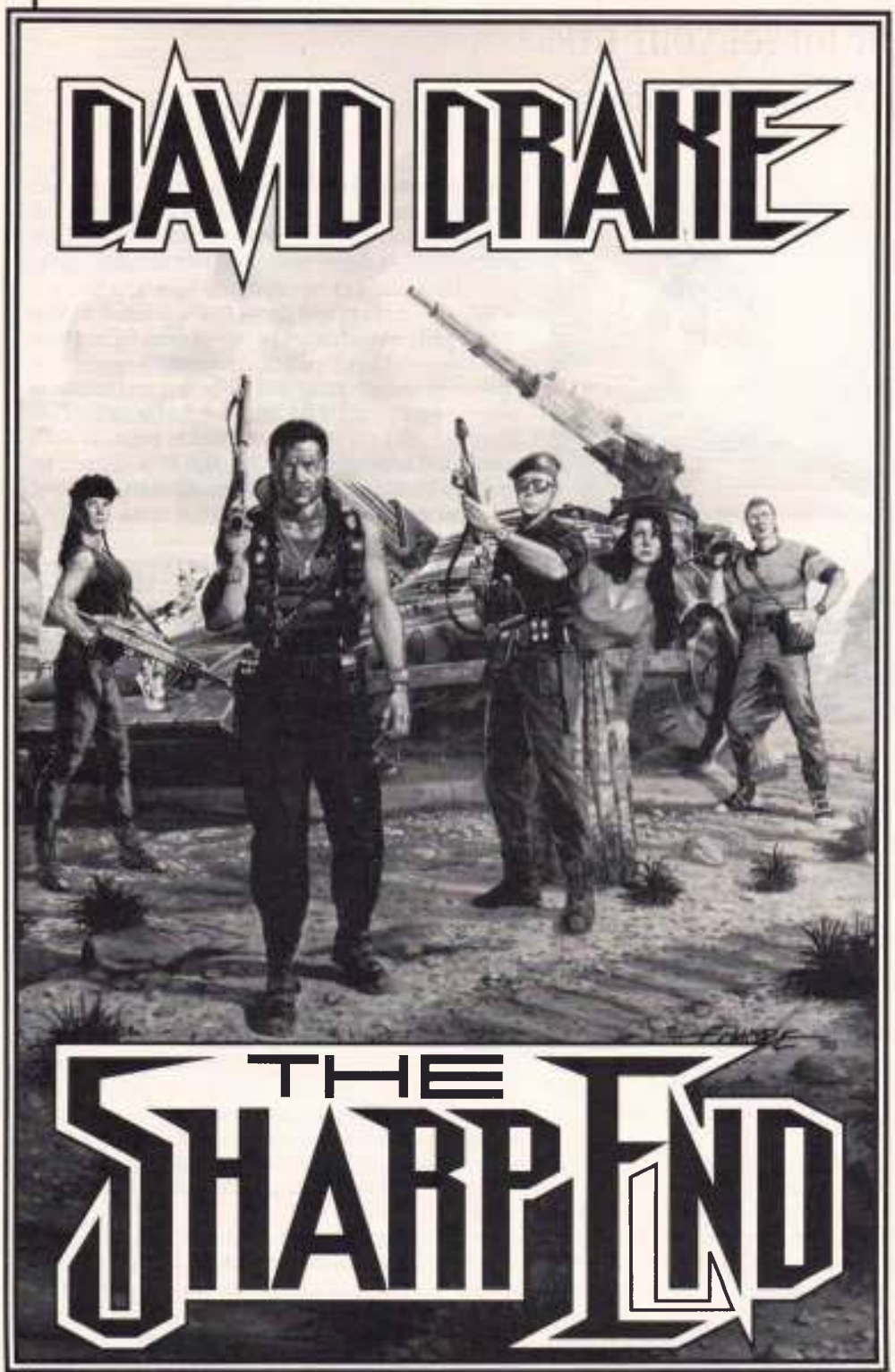

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Lieutenant Robert Barbour was not really a soldier but a man with a supernatural skill with computers. He'd been proud of that until the morning he watched while the Hammers converted his cold data into bloody rout. He'd transferred to the survey team to avoid such experiences in the future. The joke's on him.

Lieutenant Mary Margulies had survived because a friend saved her life. She's about to meet him again—as an enemy.

Sergeant Johann Vierziger: His purpose in life seemed to be to kill as often and as efficiently as possible...he at least would be at home on Cantilucca.

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By Scott Edelman

You never forget your first science fiction convention.

Frederik Pohl (left), one of SF's first fans, meets new fan Ben Gibson at the 52nd World Science Fiction Convention.

LONGTIME ATTENDEES OF SF CONVENTIONS OFTEN grow jaded, becoming immune to the otherworldly delights that surround them at these special events. From time to time I have even noticed that happening to me, for I have been attending cons for decades.

I went to my first comic book convention in 1970, my first SF convention in 1972, and my first World Science Fiction Convention, that ultimate gathering of the far-flung clans of the SF family, in 1974. I have been to hundreds of conventions since those first startling visits, and after such exposure, it is easy to take for granted the things that happen there. Recently, though, I learned once more what it is like to see the magic of SF through fresh eyes.

It all happened over the past Labor Day at Conadian, the 52nd World Science Fiction Convention. At Conadian I found a perfect cure for anyone who has forgotten what it is like to attend a con for the first time, how an ordinary hotel can become a realm as wondrous as any our field's finest world builders have created. For it was there that I met Ben Gibson, an eighteen-year-old SF and comics fan, who came with his family from Dugway, Utah in order for Ben to attend his first SF convention and meet his favorite SF creators in the flesh.

"I always dreamed of a chance to meet my favorite authors and ask them all about their books," Ben wrote to me later. And there is no better place than a WorldCon to see that dream come true. I wandered with Ben during the WorldCon weekend to see whether I could remember what it was like to come face to face with those dreams.

Joe Haldeman, author of *The Forever War*, showed Ben the hardbound notebook that is always with him, into which he was writing the text of his sequel, *The Forever Peace*. Hal Clement, the constant soul of Hard SF, allowed Ben to page through the spiral notebooks that contained charts detailing the scientific and technological background on a planet he was designing for a future story.

Robert Silverberg and Karen Haber listened as Ben described the plot of a story he was working on, and then gave him useful tips. Len Wein, creator of the comic book characters Swamp Thing and Wolverine, and currently one of the scripters for the animated *X-Men* series, gave Ben the hard facts on what it's like to write for both comics and television. Since Ben also likes to draw, he spoke to Michael Whelan, SF's premier artist, who told him what was needed to break into that niche.

For Ben, the high point of the convention was his meeting with Anne McCaffrey, the Conadian Guest of Honor, whose interplanetary dragons have found her a huge following with SF and fantasy fans alike. Anne helped Ben realize that one's idols can still be people, too. They talked not only about writing, but about pets as well. As Ben writes a column for his community newspaper about pet owners, it wouldn't surprise me at all if McCaffrey and her many cats and horses were soon to be read about by the citizens of Dugway, Utah.

You only get one chance to make a first impression and it looks as if SF was making a good impression on Ben. "I was starting to realize the secret these people shared," he later wrote me. "The sci-fi community was friendly, and generous, and modest, and always willing to help each other. I was honored to be among such people."

Seeing Ben's face light up at these encounters reminded me of similar meetings of my own.

The time I met Ted Sturgeon, who surprised me by fastidiously examining each page of the book I'd presented him, not willing to autograph it until he had found and then manually corrected a typo that had slipped through.

The time I was startled to realize that the person sitting next to me in a discussion group, paying attention to what the callow seventeen-year-old me had to say (or at least pretending well enough to fool me) was Chip Delany.

The time Isaac Asimov was polite enough to laugh at a small joke.

The time I complimented Gordon Dickson on a book that Philip K. Dick had actually written, and how he cared enough to make sure I didn't feel like a complete fool before letting me move on.

If only there was a time machine so we could attend our first con all over again, so we could remember what it was like the first time we realized that the words on the page were written by men and women of flesh and blood. For sometimes we can forget. I was lucky enough to find my time machine in the form of starry-eyed fan Ben Gibson. If you ever sense yourself getting blasé at the wonders of SF, find yourself a first-time fan like Ben, spend a weekend studying him or her, and become a teenager all over again. You'll never forget your first con. Or, in this case, someone else's. □

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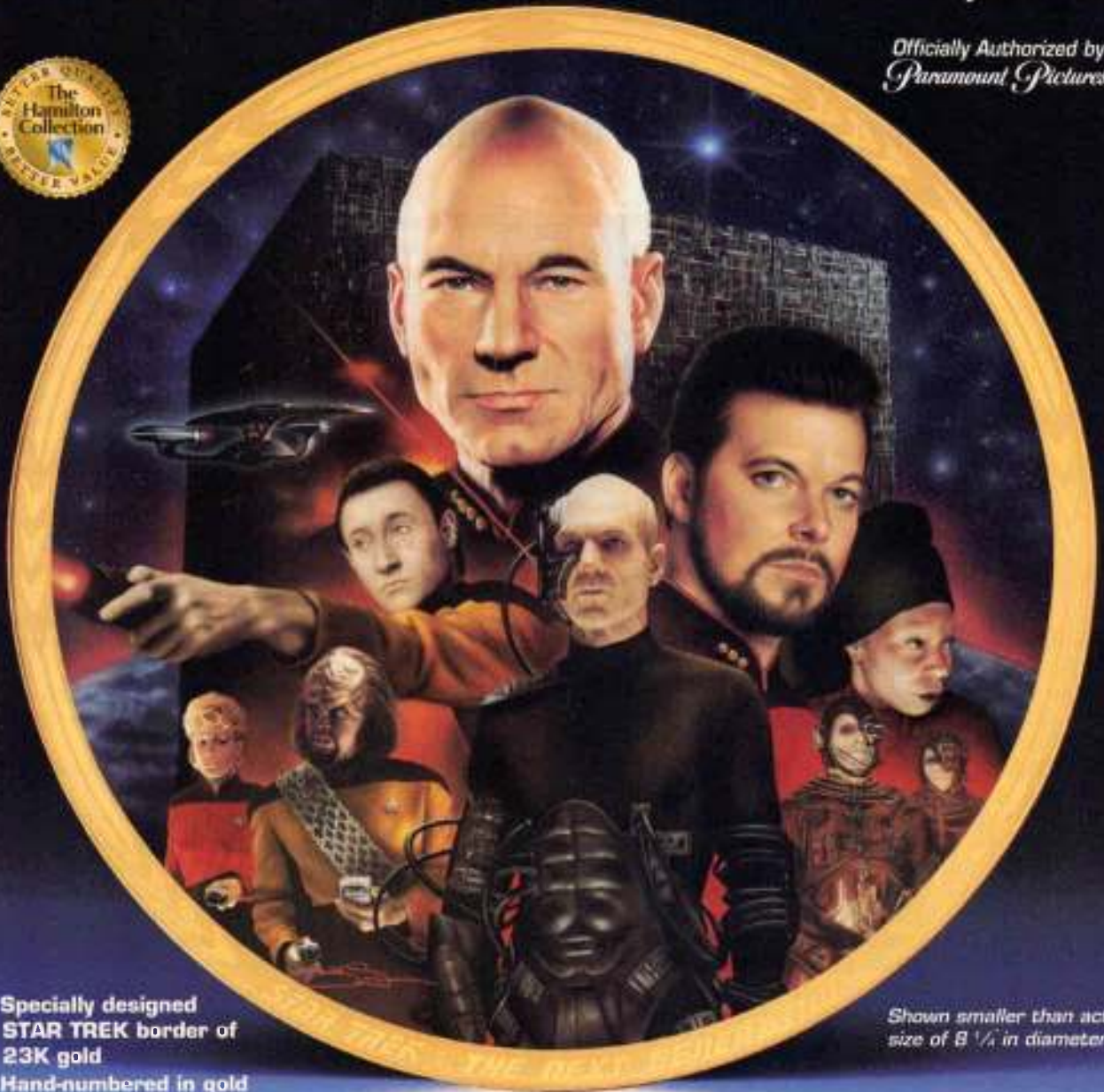

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Susan Calvin, creator of the robots, comes face to face with one of her spiritual children. Art by Mark Zug.

EVERY HONEST WORK OF WELL-CRAFTED FICTION becomes multidimensional, as thick and durable as any living thing. But some books acquire an extra dimension not normally granted to others just as well-written. Through various quirks—relating to publishing history, sociological trends, authorial personality, or political factors, among other intangibles—certain books leap or stumble into the sphere of myth and legend, for however long or short a time. One thinks of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851), *Look Homeward, Angel* (1929), or *Catch-22* (1961). More recently, we can witness the fate of Douglas Coupland's *Generation X* (1991), whose title and themes launched a thousand ad campaigns and Op-Ed think pieces.

This extratextual attention can benefit or ruin authors personally, skewing their lifetimes and/or posthumous reputations along strange paths. Whether an author ultimately benefits or is harmed remains up to chance—and the author's strength of character. But the effect of this fame or infamy on the reader is certain and indisputable. The hype and furor make it hard to approach with a clear and discerning mind a book whose every virtue and defect has been trumpeted endlessly in the media, a book which polarizes people into camps or factions. Any discussion of such a book's artistic merits is frequently overwhelmed by non-writerly concerns.

To a limited extent, this fate has overtaken Harlan Ellison's screenplay titled *I, Robot* ($14.99, Warner Books, paperback, 261 pages). Based on the famous series of early robot stories by Isaac Asimov, Ellison's book arrives complete with a wild 'n' woolly real-life scandalous history fully as intriguing as the screenplay itself. This appendage to the screenplay (or albatross or Old Man of the Sea, to use the most negative allusion) is a tale of hope and love and ambition and duplicity and spirit expended in the waste of shame known as Hollywood. Ellison's introduction—"Me 'n' Isaac at the Movies"—recounts this rollercoaster of a history with all his usual panache, bravado and fervently honest emotions. The intro ends with a bold-faced plea for all readers to raise a clamor that will be heard in the highest reaches of Warner Brothers, causing the screenplay finally to be produced, partially as a memorial to Asimov's well-loved memory and achievements.

Well. As heart-tuggers go, this is a cross between the death of Little Nell and *The Day of the Locust* (1939), and it's a stony reader who will remain unaffected by the tale behind the tale. Luckily, Ellison himself is no stranger to controversy, brawls and brouhahas over artistic integrity. He will likely not be swerved from future accomplishments by this one old crisis. But the reader, as mentioned, has to forcefully put aside all such extraneous matter, however exciting, when examining the actual script. When he does, two questions remain.

Is Ellison's script a satisfying translation of the original stories?

And does it work as a stand-alone movie on its own merits, for a viewer who might never have read Asimov?

These questions are really two sides of the same coin, however polar they might seem, because both basically ask: How deftly has Ellison walked the tightrope between adaptation and original creation?

Before addressing these issues, though, one must say that reading the screenplay itself proves to be an aesthetically satisfying experience. Reading plays and scripts in our culture is probably the least favorite or least practiced mode of reading, even for heavy-duty readers. Most of us, faced with a script, will probably flashback to high-school bouts with the Bard. But readers who pick up *I, Robot* will find that stage directions composed in Ellison's usual vividly fluent prose go down easy, conjuring up bright images. (Technical students of the cinema will also find much to savor in his choice of shots, cuts, SFX, angles and wipes.) Soon, the reader should be assimilating the book just as if it were a novel, a parity which Ellison asserts in the introduction.

About newcomer Mark Zug's 16 full-color illustrations, however, there can be no question. A combination of MIT-level blueprint sophistication and Frank Paul gosh-wow panoramas, they succeed admirably in melding the Asimovian and Ellisonian halves of the project. At times reminiscent of N.C. Wyeth, at others of Moebius, his texture-rich canvases depict robots which look fully at home among humans, and humans who look convincingly futuristic. His portrait of Susan Calvin with Lenny captures her prim, driven professionalism perfectly.

Now, on to the issue of adaptation.

In a second foreword to the script, by Asimov himself, it is mentioned that four (unnamed) robot stories have

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been used in the script. They prove to be "Robbie" (1940), "Runaround" (1942), "Liar!" (1941) and "Lenny" (1957). Additionally, the pivotal character of the robot-masquerading-as-human, Stephen Byerley, has been taken from "Evidence" (1946) and "The Evitable Conflict" (1950), along with the notion of monster computers' brains threatening to dominate mankind.

What Ellison has done is to build his script around the famous figure of Susan Calvin, robopsychologist. (*Citizen Kane* [1941] is his avowed template.) Inserting her into the events of "Robbie" and "Runaround," in which she did not originally appear, he then more straightforwardly adapts "Liar!" and "Lenny," in which she did figure prominently.

Substituting the toddler, Calvin, for Robbie's original charge, little Gloria, is a good move. We gain insight into the foundations of Calvin's robot-fixation, along with her somewhat Oedipal-based ambition. But placing her on dangerous Mercury with troubleshooters Donovan and Powell seems a miscalculation. Calvin's ambiance was always the lab and the boardroom, and turning her into a kind of Sigourney Weaver prototype, for however brief an episode, just doesn't work.

On the whole, in these episodes Ellison succeeds in retaining what Asimov called a "cerebral" tone, while providing enough visual interest and suspense to captivate the viewer oblivious to the originals. Asimov's conception of realistic robots is never betrayed, and Ellison's screen robots would certainly have been uniquely sophisticated creations.

But these four core stories serve, however essentially, merely as flashbacks of various sorts. The real time narrative frame is where Ellison's major contribution lies. It's a coherent and vigorous scenario, and would probably do killer box-office, even if this eighteen-year-old script may not seem as cutting edge as it once did.

The year is 2076, and an intergalactic civilization complete with aliens, teleport devices and anti-gravity is in full flower. Susan Calvin, born in 1994, is eighty-two years old and a famous recluse. Donovan and Powell are old frontiersmen. And the human-robot Byerley, having guided mankind to a certain plateau of development, outwitting the giant brains and forestalling interstellar wars, has apparently voluntarily self-destructed, to permit organic life to manage its own destiny.

Although all this must have seemed vaguely feasible back in long-ago 1977, it now reads as implausible. For a generation of readers used to conceptualizing 2076 as a gutted cyberpunk/Mad Max/Robocop future quite possibly more degenerate than the present, Ellison's scenario reads like wish-fulfillment. Although he takes pains to develop everything rigorously, the initial hopeful premises just never materialized, nor do they seem likely to now.

However, if the reader is willing to switch mental gears and follow viewpoint character

Bob Bratenahl, reporter for *Cosmos* on-line magazine, as he seeks to unravel the piquant mystery of the relationship between Calvin and Byerley, he will be treated to a whizbang tour of Ellison's future, which includes ancient lost cities in Earth's Amazon, glittering arcologies housing hundreds of thousands of people, and the lightning-wracked world of Kitalpha XVI, among other exciting venues. Ellison's immense knowledge of and affection for old movies is evident on every page of the script, and the reader detects tributes to serials and Westerns of yore, as well as the aforementioned *Citizen Kane* parallels.

In short, to return to our original questions, Ellison has indeed done up Asimov's groundbreaking stories proudly into a showy package. *I, Robot* might very well still serve as the launching pad for a creditable movie which offers a unique experience not obtainable through the tales alone.

***Pictures at 11**, by Norman Spinrad, Bantam, 464 pp, trade paperback, $12.95.*

One of the most important works to come out of science fiction's New Wave movement of the late '60s was Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron* (Doubleday, 1969), a novel about a TV talk show host who takes on a corrupt government in near-future America. *Bug Jack Barron* generated excitement—and considerable ire, mainly from old guard fans and critics—within a genre that had already been thoroughly rattled by changes wrought by a new generation of writers. Marketed in paperback as a mainstream thriller, it also established a reputation for its young author as a world-class muckraker.

It's been twenty-five years since Jack Barron bugged SF readers, and Norman Spinrad is still raking muck wherever he can find it. Although *Pictures at 11* is not a sequel to *Bug Jack Barron*, it shares many qualities with the earlier book. It could easily be mistaken for a mainstream thriller, its theme is revolution, and it's about television.

The setting is a third-rate Los Angeles TV station; the time is now, or at least a near-future so close to the present that it scarcely matters. The KLAX evening news team is wrapping up the six o'clock broadcast when armed terrorists break into the building, force their way into the air studio, and take control of the station and its satellite-linked airwaves.

> The plot takes countless twists and turns.... The result is a Chinese puzzle box; once you think you've got the box figured out, Spinrad reveals another drawer.

The Green Army Commandos, a militant eco-saboteur group led by a German demagogue, quickly makes its demands. Unless Proposition 17, pending legislation that would erect nuclear-powered saltwater desalination plants off the Southern California coast, is defeated in a referendum vote two days hence, the terrorists will detonate the Semtex bombs they've placed throughout the building, killing themselves and their hostages. If the station's signal is interrupted or the police attempt to raid the building before then, the bombs will go off. No negotiation is possible.

As a demonstration of their willingness to die for the cause, one Green Army member—a former worker at the pilot desalination plant who is already dying of radiation cancer—uses an explosive vest to commit suicide outside the building in full view of both the L.A. cops who have surrounded the studio and the audience watching on live TV. The feds are then informed that the Semtex bombs are salted with plutonium dust; although their detonations wouldn't cause a thermonuclear chain-reaction, an explosion could contaminate downtown L.A.

And so we're off and running. If this book had been written by a mainstream novelist,

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the result might have been different. The story would have been told absolutely deadpan, with little or no humor, with the three-person KLAX news team depicted as innocent victims, the terrorists as totally evil, and the authorities as selflessly struggling to save the lives of the hostages. Your typical paperback potboiler, complete with the usual sex and violence.

However, Spinrad resists playing this boring old game. The story takes place entirely within the KLAX studio. Although the station manager is in phone contact with LAPD, the FBI, and eventually a CIA hostage negotiator, the viewpoint never leaves the building; we meet these people only as voices on the other end of the phone line. From time to time, we witness distant events as seen upon a TV screen. The result is that the reader sees the story solely through the eyes of the hostages…and the TV audience.

Second, from the moment the police arrive, it becomes clear to the hostages that they have as much to fear from the notoriously trigger-happy L.A. cops as the terrorists themselves. This puts the KLAX news team—realistically portrayed as talking-head media slaves rather than seasoned, omnicompetent TV journalists—in the position of first cooperating, then eventually conspiring, with the Green Army Commandos. Because the authorities outside are more than willing to let them die just to save face, the hostages must use their wits to save themselves; since they soon come to sympathize with terrorists as individuals, and vice-versa, the ensuing battle of wits takes on unexpected dimensions.

Finally, there's a welcome bit of dark humor, with cynicism as black as the ink on a Hollywood contract. An L.A. talent agent becomes the principal negotiator between the Green Army Commandos and the FBI. The terrorists host a call-in talk show, and are surprised by the result. The KLAX weather girl, apparently a bimbo, emerges as the most intelligent and courageous person in the building. Electronic instant polls are consulted by all sides in order to decide what their next move should be.

Even if this reviewer wanted to spoil the ending for you, he couldn't; it would take too long to explain. The plot takes countless twists and turns, with one complication leading to another. The result is a Chinese puzzle box; once you think you've got the box figured out, Spinrad reveals another drawer.

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

Dragon Moon, by Chris Claremont and Beth Fleisher (Bantam Spectra). Fantasy and reality mix when a Brooklyn comic book writer's weekend adventures in a medieval reenactment society bring forth a 1,000-year-old foe. Includes numerous color and b&w illustrations by John Bolton.

Return to the Twilight Zone, edited by Carol Serling (DAW). There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to man, and Carol Serling takes us there, with short stories by Pamela Sargent, Charles Grant, Jack Dann, and others, all of which unlock the key to your imagination.

The Vonnegut Encyclopedia, by Marc Leeds (Greenwood Press). His novels may no longer be marketed as SF, but *Cat's Cradle* was a Hugo nominee, and his words still share our spirit. His fans won't want to miss this guide to the creator of Ice-Nine and Harrison Bergeron.

The X-Files, by Charles L. Grant (Harper Prism). Step into an all-new story about the government team whose paranormal investigations are taking media SF by storm. Written by the master of quiet horror, who brings his own special brand of paranoia to Scully and Mulder.

Ingathering: The Complete People Stories of Zenna Henderson, by Zenna Henderson (NESFA Press). The People were shipwrecked aliens whose psi-powers had helped them survive on Earth, and they became one of SF's most-loved short story cycles. Back in print after far too long an absence.

My Brother Blubb: A Stitch in Time Saves Slime, by Mel Gilden (Pocket Minstrel). Sydney Agenda has invented an artificial creature that can turn into a cat, a dog, or even a little boy. After ninjas kidnap his creator, Blubb must become a superhero in this new Young Adult series.

Star Wreck 7: The Fido Frontier, by Leah Rewolinski (St. Martin's). Spare the Roddenberry and spoil the child, or so believes the author of the latest installment of the series which goes where no spoof novels have gone before. There's no dreck like Star Dreck.

The Fiction of L. Ron Hubbard, by William J. Widder (Bridge). Everything you ever wanted to know about the creative universe of the only SF author ever to found both a religion and Writers of the Future. Follow him from his earliest pulp sales through his best-selling dekalogy.

Selected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, edited by Betty T. Bennett (Johns Hopkins University Press). Her mother invented feminism, and she invented SF's modern Prometheus, the Frankenstein monster. Peer into the mind of the woman who inadvertently gave us all our tomorrows.

The Lucky 13th: Side Show, by Rick Shelley (Ace). Joe Baerclau is back! This time he goes behind enemy lines to rescue the scientists who've discovered the secret to liberating an alien planet. If you've enjoyed Shelley's stories here, you'll know why you should catch up with this one.

With a novel of such complexity, there's bound to be a bit of manipulation involved, with some unlikely subplots contrived to keep the story rolling. That's forgivable, because the author eventually pays off the debt.

Like its ancestor, *Pictures at 11* is contemporary SF flying in under radar as a Stealth mainstream novel. It's about the power of satellites and lenses, mikes and Uzis, politics and show biz. When Spinrad is at his best, he makes people uncomfortable, and this is a very disturbing thriller.

Allen Steele

Travellers in Magic: *Collected stories by Lisa Goldstein; Tor Books, 288 pp, $20.95.*

Depressingly few science fiction and fantasy writers ever make the jump from genre to mainstream success.The groves of Academe eventually saw fit to drop a few of their gilt-edged leaves upon works by Ursula LeGuin, Samuel R. Delany, John Crowley and Phillip K. Dick—rather late in the careers of the first two, although Crowley was last year recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Letters, where he has a champion in Harold Bloom.

So it is with more than the usual sense of relief that one welcomes a new book by Lisa Goldstein. Goldstein's first novel, *The Red Magician*, won the National Book Award. Subsequent full-length works, dealing with themes as disparate yet smoothly handled as surrealism, Elizabethan hugger-mugger, and misadventures in the Third World, have gotten critical acclaim and the attention of tony periodicals such as *The New Yorker*. I am glad to say that (as of this writing, at least) Ms. Goldstein is alive and well in San Francisco, where she can presumably read the happy-making reviews her work generates.

A year hardly passes without Goldstein's short fiction appearing on the Nebula, Hugo and World Fantasy Award ballots, as well as within the usual spate of years-best anthologies. Her new book, *Travellers in Magic*, collects fifteen of these stories. Its insipid title not withstanding, this is an impressive volume. Goldstein has never shied from writing tales that are, if not quite controversial, still unusually provocative. Several of the tales presented here deal with the Holocaust; although not the Holocaust itself so much as the lingering scars it has left upon the children and grandchildren of survivors. These characters—the daughters and granddaughters of concentration camp survivors—have rather mundane lives that are seemingly charmed, if without resonance, until the past intrudes.

In "Alfred," the past is invoked through the sweet eponymous revenant who visits his grandchild after school. In "Breadcrumbs and Stones" a more ominous shadow falls when the descendants of a young man killed at Auschwitz learn the hidden meaning behind their mother's seemingly benign retellings of classic fairy tales. Goldstein plumbs her own family history again for the more upbeat "A

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Traveller at Passover" and allows us a too-brief glimpse into Judaic tradition and folklore in "Split Light," a canny Borgesian nugget about the seventeenth-century holy man who must choose between conversion or giving the world another religion to wage wars for.

Goldstein's tales are peripatetic, touching down here in Cairo, there in mid-twentieth century America, yet again in Amaz, the Third World nation that, in Melville's words, "is not down on any map; true places never are." Amaz forms a purposefully exotic backdrop to three stories in this collection (as well as to Goldstein's novel *Tourists*). A place where visitors from America are apt to lose their minds along with their passports, its fallen temples reminiscent at once of the Maya and ancient Egypt and those sepia-tinged photographs of melancholy ruins dating from the Victorian era.

Goldstein's style seems almost too well-bred, choosing to show us a few treasured heirlooms saved from the wreckage of the past... rather than charred bones and ashes.

Goldstein's prose is restrained rather than elegant, which sometimes works against her more ambitious tales: "Breadcrumbs and Stones," for example, suffers in comparison to Jane Yolen's short novel *Briar Rose*, a remarkably similar palimp-sest of "Hansel and Gretel."

But Yolen does not shy away from the most horrific elements of her tale; whereas Goldstein's style seems almost too well-bred, choosing to show us a few treasured heirlooms saved from the wreckage of the past—a pocketwatch, a blurred photograph—rather than charred bones and ashes. This restraint works in overtly fantastic stories like "Cassandra's Photographs" and "Preliminary Notes on the Jang," giving them an ironic edge and sense of detachment.

This restraint is less successful in "Ever After" and "Infinite Riches," more didactic efforts that suffer from Goldstein's somewhat bloodless styling. I wished for more stories along the lines of "Splight Light," hitherto unpublished, yet as extravagant and self-contained as a roc's egg. So I hope that Goldstein's concern for finding her niche within the genre (made clear in several author's notes) doesn't keep her from hieing off into fictional *terra incognita* again. We need more explorers of her rank, Burtons to the usual riffraff pillaging our dreams.

Elizabeth Hand

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

•Gene Wolfe is a master illusionist, as any reader of his *Book of the New Sun* knows. The volumes that make up that massive tale have already entered the SF canon and attain a depth of creation rarely realized either in or out of our genre. Wolfe's work evidences a loving knowledge of religion, politics, weaponry, biology and arcane lore possessed by only a few. While his classic work is easily readable and understandable by those who do not share that knowledge, some readers will want to follow Wolfe's thought processes back to their source. It is for devout readers such as these that Michael Andre-Driussi has edited *Lexicon Urthus: A Dictionary of the Urth Cycle* (Sirius Fiction, hardcover, 298 pages, $39.95), which mines the *Book of the New Sun* for all of its allusions and references, laying bare Wolfe's handiwork not only in the words of 950 entries, but also in 105 illustrations and four maps.

The editor has worked for four years on this lexicon, which will tell you why it would be uncomfortable to be part of a coffle, why you should avoid abacination, who Jurupari was, and many other literary secrets of the Urth cycle. Gene Wolfe himself has provided a foreword. *Lexicon Urthus* makes a perfect gift for any fan of his work, and from the way his words sell, it appears that there are many deserving readers out there waiting.

•Some days it seems that everyone who reads science fiction wants to write it too.

Hundreds of manuscripts flow into our office each month. We can only publish a fraction of them each issue, and the competition is fierce. How does a beginning writer create a manuscript that can win the race? Some of the answers can be found in the pages of *Science Fiction Writer's Market Place and Sourcebook* (Writer's Digest Books, hardcover, 486 pages, $19.99). This volume covers all possible markets for your work, from the majors such as *Science Fiction Age* and *Realms of Fantasy*, through smaller magazines such as *Unreality*, *Mindsparks*, and *Daughters of Nyx*. Markets for longer works have been provided as well, both here and overseas.

Essays on the components of a winning story have been provided by Orson Scott Card, Nancy Kress, and others. Also included are tips on how to find an agent, where the best conventions are to talk up SF with your peers, and on-line services that cater to SF writers and readers.

One particularly fascinating section, titled Anatomy of a Sale, shows editors at work, presenting three complete short stories as well as the opening chapters of a novel, along with essays from the editors who bought them, explaining exactly *why* they worked, always of interest for those still seeking their first sales. If you're tired of books for writers which seem to relegate SF and fantasy to a few sneering pages, this book is designed to end your frustration.

•The history of science fiction film is not just the story of its superstars, but also the story of those who never rose above bit parts in Grade B flicks that were best watched in drive-ins, where the smell of popcorn and insecticide could distract in some small way from the cheesy effects and flimsy plots on the screen.

Tom Weaver remembers and loves these character actors, whose names are for the most part forgotten, even though their faces will live forever in your memory. *Attack of the Monster Movie Makers: Interviews with 20 Genre Giants* (McFarland, hardcover, 384 pages, $35.00) engages in a bit of hyperbole with its title, for few in this volume, save perhaps Vincent Price or Cameron Mitchell, ever achieved more than cult status.

But that's exactly the fun of this volume. Stars can get boring after awhile, and as these interviews reveal, character actors had exactly that—character. Rose Hobart, who played Fredric March's fiancée in the 1931 *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, considered herself "a sort of Jane Fonda in my day, but without her dough or her clout. So, I got blacklisted." Said Cameron Mitchell: "I don't like gore pictures, I won't see them. I make 'em, but I don't have to look at them." Kenneth Tobey, who took out James Arness in *The Thing From Another World*, revealed that "I feel I've had a career. Maybe not a great career, but what the hell."

We should be thankful to Weaver for capturing the voices of a dying era eager to share their secrets and sorrows before time ran out.

•Betty Ballantine helped create science fiction as we know it. As one of the founders of Bantam Books and later Ballantine Books, she helped mold the face of SF with her editing of such seminal works as Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and anthologies such as *Star Science Fiction Stories*.

Now she once again helps take us to a new world, but this time the alien universe is one which has been right beneath our noses. *The Secret Oceans* (Bantam Books, hardcover, $29.95) tells the tale of a near future aquatic odyssey. The crew of the *Turtle* descends to the ocean depths with one goal—to open communication with the whales. But their voyage soon brings them to an amazing discovery—a species even more intelligent than mankind, one that takes them captive for their own scientific studies.

The volume is heavily illustrated, with a dozen different artists detailing every step of the journey in full-color. The art and text also prove educational, for in positing intriguing new forms, we are also shown glimpses of the ocean life we already know.

The Secret Oceans shares the same format as *Dinotopia*, and the journey it tells should appeal to the same fans.□

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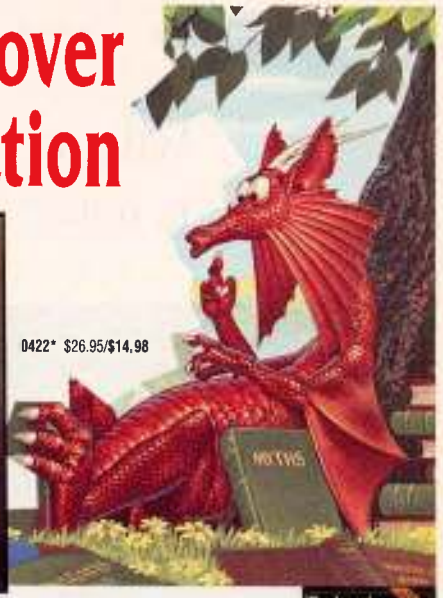

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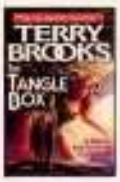

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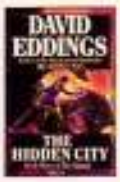

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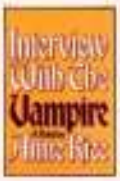

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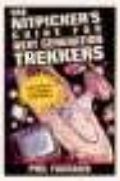

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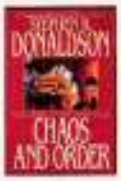

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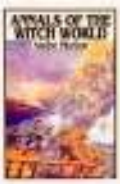

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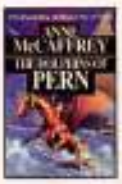

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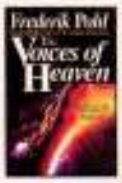

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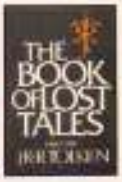

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By Lisa Maccarillo

William Gibson's cyberpunk future is made real in *Johnny Mnemonic*.

Johnny Mnemonic (Keanu Reeves) has just uploaded the world's most valuable information into his chip-implanted brain. Now he has to avoid a deadly cast of characters to stay alive in William Gibson's cyberpunk adventure.

"IN MY MIND, THE FIRST PERSON I MADE THE movie for was William because the world is his creation, in a sense," says artist and film director Robert Longo, speaking of William Gibson, whose SF novels have made him the guru of cyberpunk. "I think the idea of making pictures out of words is a tough one, particularly William's words, because they're so visual to begin with. *Johnny Mnemonic* is in many ways a mutant. It's much bigger than the story, and the look of the film is like my art."

Though Gibson has been a prominent literary figure in both mainstream and genre circles, and despite the fact that names like James Cameron and Ridley Scott have been mentioned in connection with past Gibson projects, *Johnny Mnemonic* is the first adaptation of his work to actually reach the big screen. Gibson erupted onto the SF scene with the publication of *Neuromancer* in 1984, which won the Hugo, Nebula and Philip K. Dick awards and changed the face of science fiction. His follow-up novels—*Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, and *Virtual Light*—have proven equally as popular, and earned him a hefty six-figure advance for his next book.

Johnny Mnemonic is based upon a short story which appeared in Gibson's 1986 collection, *Burning Chrome*. Longo describes it as *"Touch of Evil* meets *Blade Runner* meets Federico Fellini. William Gibson and I made a mutant," he says. "It's a strange film—part science fiction, part thriller; heavy on the special effects, but special effects ain't the movie. It's a real basic story about a guy who finds meaning in people. It's also just this amazing ride into the future."

The film stars Keanu Reeves, still blisteringly hot from the success of runaway box-office hit *Speed*, as Johnny, a bio-enhanced smuggler-for-hire who delivers hot data in his chip-implanted brain. The information he carries is so important that unauthorized access to it could kill him. The multinational corporation it was stolen from and the shadowy crime syndicate working for them will do anything to get it back, including cutting off the courier's head. The only thing that stands between Johnny and oblivion is a surgically enhanced female bodyguard named Jane (played by Dina Meyer), a mythical refuge called Heaven, and Johnny's own capacity to trust. Gibson readers will note that "Jane" replaces Molly Millions, a *femme fatale* who appears in both the story "Johnny Mnemonic" and in the novel *Neuromancer*; that's because film rights to the Molly character are currently tied up with *Neuromancer*, which may well become a second Gibson feature, if *Johnny Mnemonic* opens well.

After several years in development for this picture, Longo found it a special thrill to finally see in the flesh the character he had carried in his head for so long. It was "mind-blowing," he says. "I was in the trailer with Keanu, making the last decision to cut his sideburns off and cut his hair a certain way, and I said, 'Look, go to the other side of the trailer, get dressed, and call me' because I did that a lot in my studio—whenever I had to assemble a big sculpture that I'd been planning, I'd face the other way while the assistants put it together, and then I would turn around in the chair and get this first rush of a look. I did that with Keanu—and there was Johnny standing in front of me. He was just Johnny to the bone. It was amazing."

Transforming Gibson's vividly drawn prose into moving pictures was a challenge the director relished. "The thing that's interesting about art is that there's one thing that nobody can take away from you and that's inspiration," Longo says. "If one artist inspires another, it's like currency—you trade back. To have a concrete picture of everything, from a cigarette burning in an ashtray to the color of the blinds to the buttons on a cuff, is an interesting thing when you're a writer. William came to visit the set a lot and got real emotional. At one point, he had to go back to the hotel because it was just freaking him out that he could see what he'd written."

As the prime mover in the cyberpunk universe, Gibson's trademark style has one foot in a high-tech but decomposing urban future while the other rests in the vast computer-generated slipstream known as cyberspace. "The cyberspace stuff is fairly simple," Longo explains. "It's not like an LSD trip. It's actually very workmanlike when we do it. When Johnny travels within these machines, it's kind of a consensus hallucination of all the collective knowledge of the human race. It's like opening up a magazine and being able to go into the Sears catalogue. The space is like a huge internal city that's filled with everything you can think of, except that travel is just a matter of waving your hand."

Another visual challenge for Longo was to create a future which hasn't already been seen a hundred times. "It's difficult to make a futuristic movie," he says, "because our vision of the future is already so clichéd. We're nostalgic for the future. I think the key to this movie

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Johnny's surgically enhanced bodyguard Jane (Dina Meyer) confronts Pretty (Traci Tweed), Ralphi (Udo Kier) and Yomamma (Falconer Abraham).

that gives it a futuristic touch is that the technology in the movie is very casual, even though it's very advanced. The advanced technology is used for the most mundane things."

To avoid a generic sameness in the effects, Longo hired three visual effects companies to make the virtual reality scenes. "I designed the scenes very specifically with drawings that they all contributed to and collaborated on," he says. "I don't really care how they did it. That's for gearheads. I'm not a gearhead. I wish I was at times."

Longo assembled a diverse cast of players which includes action-film star Dolf Lundgren as a deranged, unstoppable bounty hunter named Street Preacher; rapper-turned-actor Ice-T as J-Bone, an underground outlaw; Udo Kier (best known for his title performance in *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein)* as a kind of twenty-first century pimp named Ralfi; Takeshi Kitano as Takahashi, the ambivalent head of a corporation that has grown cynical around him; and poet/rocker Henry Rollins as Spider, a doctor specializing in surgically-altered humans. Longo comments on his cast: "Ice-T is incredibly noble in this picture. Instead of playing his usual Gangsta, Ice plays

SPIELBERG BRINGS NEW LIFE TO *DR. WHO*

Dr. Who, the long-running British cult classic which has survived to become the longest running SF television show in the universe, will soon be appearing in a new incarnation on the Fox Network. Fox, in conjunction with Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment, is moving ahead with its plans to create twenty-two episodes of a new version of the time-traveling *Dr. Who*, with the pilot hopefully ready to debut as early as next spring.

John Keeley, who has scripted for series as diverse as *Miami Vice*, *Nightmare Cafe*, and *The Blue and the Grey*, has turned in a first draft version of the pilot episode which has reportedly already been approved by the BBC, which will be a full co-producer in this project. Few story elements are being released at this time, though it is known that some of the secrets surrounding the doctor's origins as a Time Lord will be revealed. In addition, the popular robotic Daleks will be making their return.

The executive director will be Peter Wagg, whose SF credentials include the late, lamented CBS version of *Max Headroom*, a cult favorite in its own right. Principal photography is scheduled to begin in early March, in hopes of meeting a May deadline for initial telecast during ratings sweeps week. Depending on audience response, Amblin would then begin preparation for the regular series, to start airing in the following fall.

While no formal casting decisions have been announced, nor has a director even been selected, the Hollywood and SF rumor mills have been in full swing. Actors as diverse as David Hasselhoff, Dudley Moore, Tom Cruise, and *Monty Python*'s John Cleese and Eric Idle have had their names surface as possible candidates for playing the latest embodiment of the good doctor.

As *Dr. Who* has the ability to periodically regenerate his entire body the way many of us change clothes, demonstrated by the way seven different actors have been able to play the part over the past thirty years, anything is possible.

a character that has purpose. Henry Rollins does the same. They're very strong in the movie. Henry's a real surprise. Udo Kier is just magic. I knew Udo's work and he's a very old friend of my wife's."

In the role of a mysterious cyber-presence named Anna, Longo cast his wife Barbara Sukowa, an actress and frequent model for his art, which allowed him to move his entire family up to Montreal for the shoot. And, a week before the principal photography, Sukowa gave birth to their third child, Joseph. "He's a Canadian," boasts the beaming new dad.

Longo and his cast and crew spent the entire spring of 1994 "freezing to death in Canada. Now we know why these people drink a lot of beer." At one point, Longo nearly killed himself while scouting locations in the "Great White North."

"I was like two hundred feet up in the air and I went looking for a shot," he recalls with a laugh. "I thought everyone was following me. Then I realized that I had gone where nobody else went. It was an old, rusted-out bridge, and part of the guardrail gave way. I was just hanging there and I ripped up my shoulder holding myself up. I immediately went back to the trailer and threw up."

Alternately described as one of the most provocative and visionary artists working in America today, Longo has shown his paintings, drawings, sculptures and installations in major galleries around the world. Longo grew up in Long Island and earned his B.A. from State University College in Buffalo, New York. In 1974, while still in Buffalo, he co-founded the renowned "Hallwalls," an exhibition and studio space for contemporary art. He held his first solo New York gallery exhibition at Metro Pictures in 1981 and has since garnered a solid, world-wide reputation as a complex, visionary artist.

In 1986, Longo began to experiment with directing operas, music videos and short films. Among the videos he directed are R.E.M.'s *The One I Love* and New Order's *Bizarre Love Triangle.* His award-winning short film, entitled *Arena Brains*, starring Eric Bogosian, Ray Liotta and Sean Young, premiered at the New York Film Festival in 1987. In 1992, Longo directed a season premiere episode of HBO's *Tales From the Crypt* entitled "This'll Kill Ya." The following year all of his films and videos were showcased at the Éspace Lyonnais d'Art Contemporain in Lyon, France.

Johnny Mnemonic became Longo's first feature as a result of a phone call the artist made ten years ago; on reading *Neuromancer*, William Gibson's award-winning first novel, Longo was so impressed by the book he wanted to talk with the writer. Thus began a ten-year friendship that sharpened Longo's resolve to be the first to bring Gibson to the screen. The artist optioned the rights to the story and took it through two screenplay drafts as he sought financing. When the deal was in place, Gibson was brought in to write

Continued on page 81

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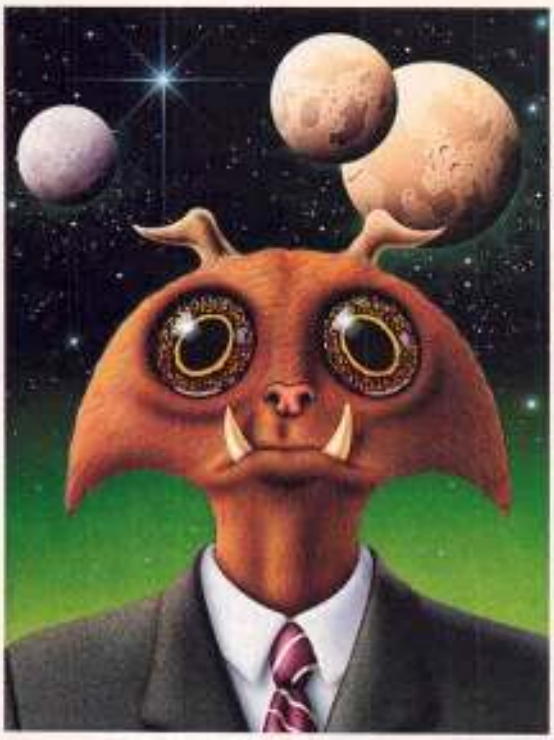
By Arlan Andrews, Yoji Kondo and Charles Sheffield

When Earth has its first contact with alien beings, will we be ready?



Will aliens be "alien" like the creature from the film (below)? Or will they be just like us? "Knurr" by W.B. Johnston.

IS THERE ANYBODY OUT THERE? AND IF SO, WHAT HAPpens next? In our September 1993 issue, our Science Forum met to discuss SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence in the universe. This issue, we turn our focus one step beyond, as our three participants speculate on what will occur when we finally come face to face with alien beings.

Yoji Kondo was the head of the Astrophysics Laboratory at the Johnson Space Center at the time of the Apollo missions to the Moon , and is currently the director of the International Ultra-Violet Explorer satellite observatory at Goddard Space Center. He publishes fiction under the pen name Eric Kotani, and recently edited *Requiem: New Collected Works of Robert A. Heinlein.* Charles Sheffield is chief scientist at the Earth Satellite Corporation. He recently won both the Hugo and Nebula awards for his novelette "Georgia on My Mind." Arlan Andrews is the manager of the Advanced Manufacturing Initiatives Department at Sandia National Laboratories, and has had fiction published in all of the major SF magazines, including this one. He was formerly on the staff of the White House Science Office.

SF AGE: Before we discuss what it might be like to come face to face with an alien, perhaps we should see if we have any consensus on whether or not the universe holds anything alien out there for us to find in the first place.

SHEFFIELD: I consider it is not only unknown, but it is unknowable. The only way you'll know there's an alien life form is when you encounter one, if you encounter one. Until that happens, it's rather like a discussion of angels, except that you can imagine encountering an alien; it's rather difficult for me to imagine encountering an angel.

ANDREWS: I see your presumption here is that if and when we do encounter aliens, we would recognize them as life. They don't have to be only anthropoid or humanoid, and maybe they're not even anything recognizable. They would not have to even be corporeal, as we recognize it. They might be energy forms, miasmas, plasmas, or colonies.

SHEFFIELD: One of the problems is that in science fiction, when one talks of alien life forms, it is usually assumed to be some sort of *intelligence.* In other words, if we were to discover a slime mold on one of the satellites of Jupiter, that would in fact be an alien life form (assuming we hadn't taken it there with us). However, it would not be a very satisfactory alien in the terms usually used by science fiction. You need *smart* aliens in science fiction. Otherwise, you might as well write about slime molds here on Earth, and that would have limited audience appeal.

KONDO: Still, an alien would not necessarily interact with human beings, even when they come to us. It is not to be assumed a priority. Consider the alien in *The Black Cloud* by Fred Hoyle. They manage to communicate with the black cloud, but one might have passed by us without really having ever established communication with human beings. That is also possible. Let me answer your first question by saying that I am inclined to be agnostic about aliens. And I guess to this extent I agree with Charles, except I think we should include the possibility of encountering aliens that may not be intelligent. As long as they are not really creatures from this planet, I think we could include them as aliens.

SHEFFIELD: Then the first question is, do we believe there is any form of life outside of the Earth, and to that, I say that I believe there is. There has to be. We're looking at ten to the eleventh stars in the galaxy, and ten to the eleventh galaxies, so you've probably got on the order of ten to the twentieth worlds. Now yes, I believe that life does exist on one of them. The question is, if it's in a galaxy that's three billion parsecs from us, is that very interesting to us, since we would never realistically be able to communicate with that life form? The answer is, it's interesting, but it's not of *practical* interest.

ANDREWS: If we knew that life was there, under any circumstances,

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there would be a great deal more than academic interest. It would impact philosophy and everything else. Let me weigh in on the side that I *do* think that there will be intelligent life elsewhere, because we've explored one solar system, albeit not thoroughly. But in that one solar system we've explored, there is at least one intelligent race and the probability of life in that one solar system—namely ours—is a hundred percent. So if you wanted to extrapolate our limited knowledge, you could say that the odds would be that *all* solar systems would support intelligent life.

KONDO: For the probability of detecting planets around any given star, it is not necessary to think only in terms of a solar type star. Solar type stars are unique in the sense that they tend to provide a stable environment for about ten or fifteen billion years. Therefore, there is a chance for life to evolve and develop into an intelligent being. So to that extent I agree with you. But planets may be found around stars other than solar types.

SHEFFIELD: One of the troubles is, we are dealing with, as Arlan said, a set with one member at the moment, which is ourselves, and extrapolation to the rest of the universe becomes tricky

SF AGE: What sort of evolutionary tracks might we extrapolate for alien life forms based on possible environments on other planets?

SHEFFIELD: I find the idea of a gaseous intelligence rather difficult, but I have no problem at all conceiving of a million different roads to intelligence, just among the limited set of options we have on this planet. On this planet, we have composite animals, which could be intelligent, namely the ants, the termites, the bees, and the wasps. We have potentially intelligent marine forms, and some people would say already that the cetaceans, the dolphins and the whales, are intelligent. And then, if you look at it logically, the great apes, the chimpanzees, the orangutan and the gorillas have missed it by so little that if we weren't here and we let the Earth run by itself for another five hundred million years, chances are very good that some other intelligent form would arise.

I think that we can see many roads to intelligence. In science fiction, aliens are very, very popular. Readers just *like* aliens, smart aliens, intelligent aliens. And it's almost inevitable, if you're going to write science fiction, that at some point you're going to make up an alien or two. I don't know if it's desirable, but agents are currently telling us to write more about aliens, because people like aliens. So there is a *commercial* pressure for aliens, which is quite different from a cosmic pressure for their existence.

ANDREWS: Since we're talking about economic pressure for aliens, I'd like to mention a couple of cinema aliens. On the one side we have *E.T.*, who is just about everybody's favorite little brother or guru, wrapped into one.

On the other end of the spectrum, we have the shape-changing alien as depicted by John Carpenter in *The Thing* about ten years ago. I think there should be a law that anybody who sees the movie *E.T.* should be required in the same double feature to see *The Thing*. Because somewhere in between there is probably going to be the spectrum of aliens that we're going to recognize and interact with. I still want to see the movie—and I've written the story—but I want to see the movie of John Carpenter's *The Thing* written from the *alien's* viewpoint. I mean, this poor innocent creature winds up on Earth, tries to do his thing in communicating, and is attacked by all these barbarians time after time while just going through its natural life cycle.

KONDO: As I said earlier, I am agnostic about the existence of aliens to begin with. But assuming that aliens exist, about which I have no proof or disproof, I tend to disagree with Charles in the sense that any indication of their existence is sufficient to cause interest in more intense search. I would agree with Arlan, if we had any indication that they existed. Having said that, I think I should point out that we tend to assume that aliens have similar cultural views. Even the most bizarre aliens in SF stories still tend to share some of our cultural values. This may not be the case at all; aliens may have their own cultural values, especially if their survival depends on very much different circumstances.

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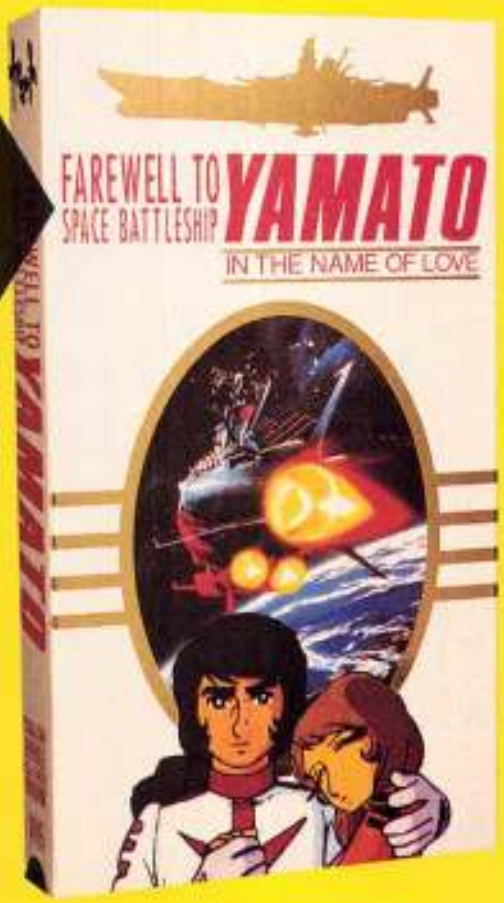

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SF AGE: In SF, however, it seems that you can't make an alien truly alien, because then no one would understand it. If we met something that was truly alien, would any sort of communication be possible?

KONDO: You're probably right. But Fred Hoyle at least partially succeeded in his *Black Cloud*. I think it's possible. You can come up with very alien concepts.

SHEFFIELD: In writing about aliens, I think about what Konrad Lorenz wrote in his book on aggression, "If a lion could speak, we would not understand it." And I have a suspicion that if we met a real live alien, we would be totally unable to communicate with it for a long period, maybe a few hundred years, except perhaps on the most basic level of mathematical theorems. We wouldn't understand its motivations. In fact, I suspect that we don't even understand the motivations of other people on Earth.

You don't even have to go very far abroad. Go down to the poorer parts of Southeast Washington and try to understand what life is like. I think that we have a big problem in adapting our own world view to theirs. Most of our troubles come because of that. So I think we might meet aliens, but I don't think we'll be able to talk to each other, even if they are smart.

SF AGE: Would we even recognize them as smart?

ANDREWS: If they arrived in spaceships, we might think that they had a technological society, but they might do this out of instinct. They might build spaceships and interstellar craft out of instinct, and they might land and practice what they're doing without being interested in what we're about.

SHEFFIELD: How do bees build a beehive? Do they do it from instinct? It's an interesting question. We don't know how they do it. We know that a single bee cannot build a beehive. A single bee can only die.

In science fiction, aliens are very, very popular. Readers just *like* aliens, smart aliens, intelligent aliens.

KONDO: Let me comment on this. Actually, I think we can speculate about the probability of intelligent alien beings developing technical culture. If you have a large enough number of alien cultures, if we're talking about billions of such cultures, surely some of those would be sufficiently advanced to come across the distance of interstellar or even intergalactic space. In some cases, then, we might assume that their technology is so advanced that, the way *we* might communicate with some lower forms of animal life, they would figure out a way to communicate with us, not because *we* are smart enough to understand them, but because *they* are intelligent enough to figure out a way.

So I think there is a possibility of communication. I do agree with Charles that, if our development levels are comparable, communication may be fairly difficult.

SHEFFIELD: If, in fact, the other society is very much more advanced than ours, then you get back to the old problem—why haven't they done something? Why haven't they given us any evidence of their activities?

One plausible argument is that there are many, many planets bearing life, and that we happen to have come along first. And if that were the case, then we're the ones who are going to have to go out and explain to the developing intelligences how one communicates. We're a long way away from being able to do that, but then we're only three and a half billion years old. As I said at WorldCon, if we've got ten to the ten to the twenty-six years or thereabouts still to go, we should be a lot better at it in a few billion years.

So the real question is, do we believe that there is at least one other intelligent organism in the universe? We have no evidence, but we like to think the answer is yes. Nobody likes to be on their own. The very idea that we're in the universe as the only intelligent species is unnerving. To me, even more disturbing is the concept of the universe with *no* intelligent species, because at that point, the

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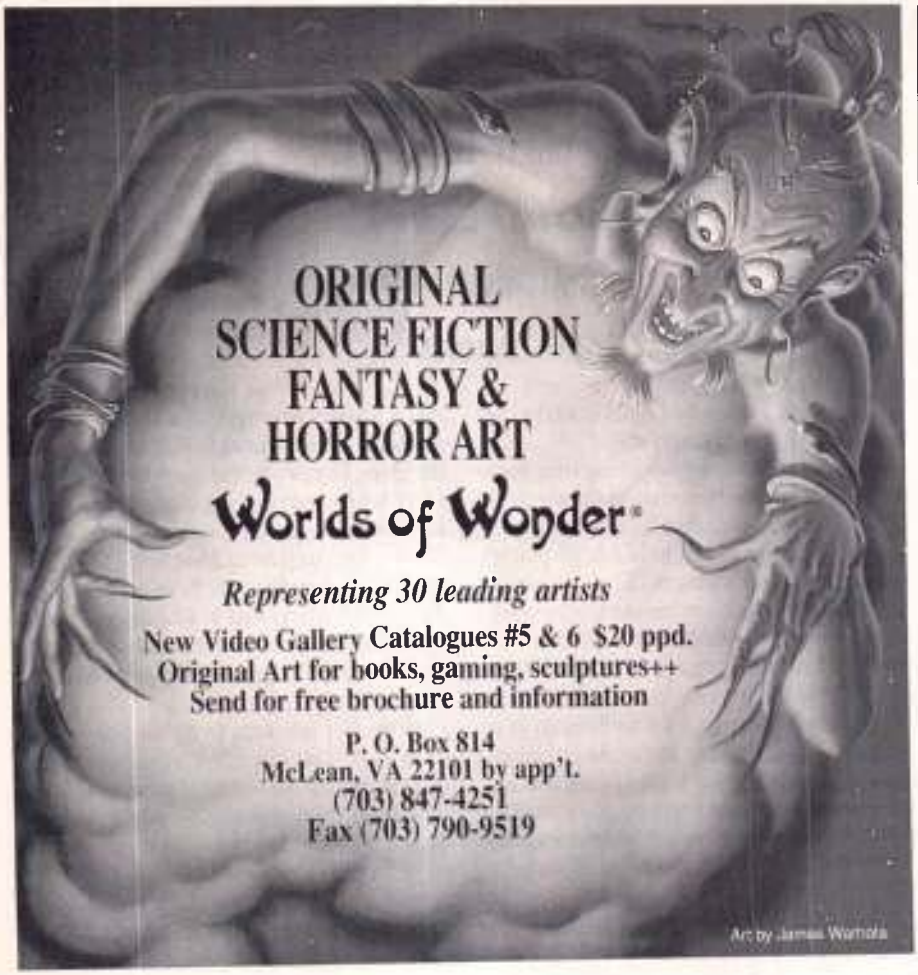

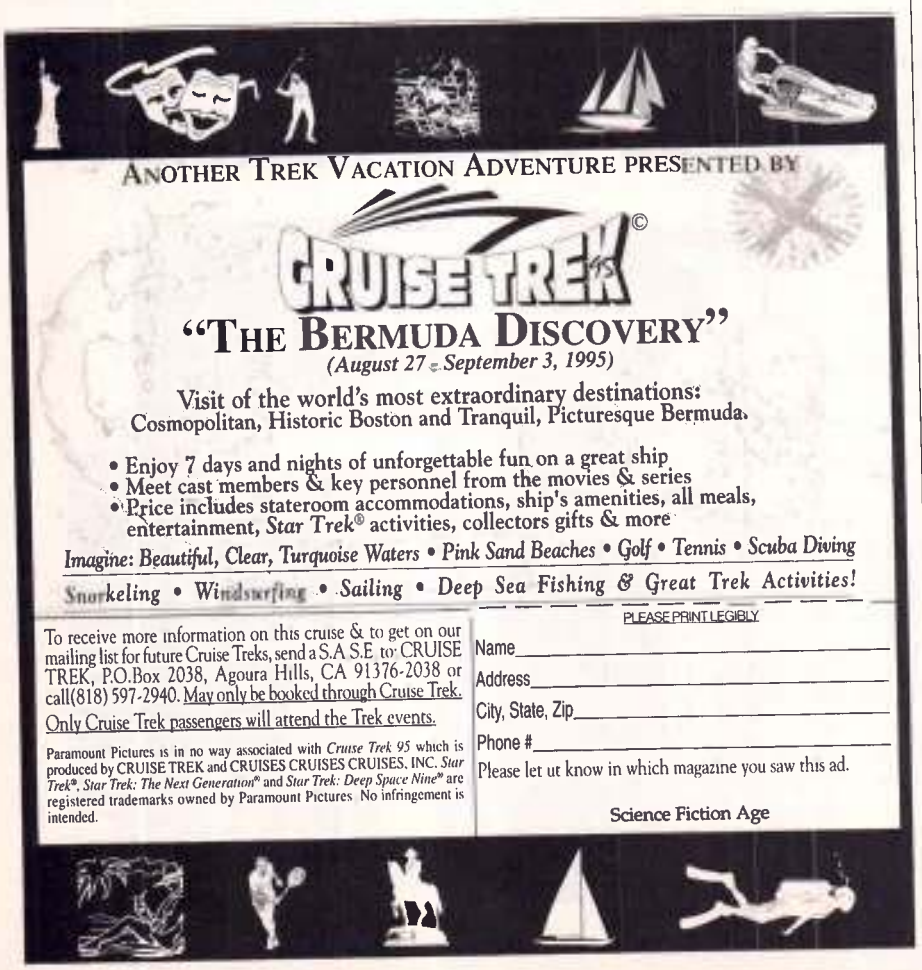
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universe itself seems to have no reason to exist. Certainly, this is almost a theological argument. The universe doesn't need a reason to exist.

ANDREWS: That's very egocentric of humans to say. How do we know that the universe doesn't have its own consciousnesses that's not inclusive of intelligence. There might be sapience of other sorts that are not necessarily intelligence. If I knew what it was, I would write about it. There could be other sorts of awareness that are not even life.

SHEFFIELD: That's too deep for me. Let me ask a question. If in bees, the hive itself was capable of intelligence, would it be an alien or wouldn't it be an alien? Does an alien have to start off-planet? Or would another intelligence, with which we have been unable to communicate so far satisfy us?

ANDREWS: You mean *women*?

KONDO: Would you accept a dog, for instance?

SHEFFIELD: If it was a smart dog. Some people say that their pets are intelligent. As Bertrand Russell said long ago, no pet can tell you that he was born of poor but humble parents. That was his dividing line, the sophistication of his intelligence. Just because a dog can find its own rear end or find a ball when you throw it does not make it intelligent.

SF AGE: Assuming we do go to another planet and find something that's only like a beehive or a dog, will we be satisfied or will we be disappointed if that's all that we found?

SHEFFIELD: I wish to present a case to you, to see how people react. Two hundred million years ago, the insects learned how to fly, and they were then lords of the atmosphere. They weren't smart; they just evolved so they could fly. So suppose that in another few billion years, on another planet, the insects learn how to exist in space. They live in space, and come back to the planet, but they can build hives, which are hives in orbit around the planet in space. And not only can they do that, but they can move these things around. So one day, arriving in Earth orbit, a beehive comes. And the bees are not really much smarter as individual bees than a bee is today. But the hive is capable of navigating interstellar space. They are aliens. Are they intelligent aliens? Do they *have* to be intelligent because they can perform interstellar travel?

ANDREWS: Well, that's what I mentioned before, that they might do things by instinct, or a learned response to their environment. I think a definition of intelligence should be that a creature or a group of creatures is intelligent if there is some way that you can perpetrate a scam on them.

SHEFFIELD: Can I offer an alternative definition? In order to be intelligent, a being must be self-conscious. It must be able to think about itself and its place in the universe. If it can't do that, by my definition, it's not intelligent.

ANDREWS: But what if it happens to be an automaton that doesn't think about itself

that's just a unit of a hive?

SHEFFIELD: If the hive mind is able to conceive of the hive, and know how the hive relates to the universe, and can actually conceive of a universe with or without the hive, then it is intelligent. No animal can do that. If a machine could do that, if a machine were able to understand that indeed it existed and conceive of a universe in which it may or may not exist, then I would say that it's an intelligent machine.

ANDREWS: We are also assuming here that intelligence is continuous. One of the things I've tried to put forth in stories is that there might be other creatures, and I think some humans, that are automatons part of the time. Unthinking, but occasionally they get together or arrive at a state of sapient intelligence or awareness for a certain task. After completion of the task, the creature breaks up and goes on to something else, and comes back together, much as a session of Congress or something else like that.

In other words, there can be colony creatures that individually are unintelligent, but occasionally, instinct would require that they get together, solve a physics problem, build a spaceship and go somewhere else, and once they get there they spread out, and a thousand years later they get together again. And in between, we wouldn't recognize them as intelligent. But occasionally, if you were there when the forces are right, when they've all got the mating call, or the living urge, they swarm together so they can do something.

SHEFFIELD: That is in *The City and the Stars* by Arthur C. Clarke. It has a composite creature that comes together once over a long period of time and is then intelligent, and then it disperses and it is not intelligent. I also have that in my novel *The Mind Pool.* The Tinker Composites are little bugs, and they're only smart when they cluster, and then they part. And the more units you get, the smarter they are. So everybody steals, right?

KONDO: Let me expand on your idea somewhat, but first, let me answer your question. If we should run into a beehive when we get to the planet around Alpha Centauri or any one of those alien worlds, we are at least more than halfway there. Because it will show us that life can emerge on another planet, and there will likely be billions of such worlds, and it is not likely that our world is the only one.

But to expand on your idea, there are lots of human beings, for instance, who do things almost by instinct, who grow up, get married, get a job, acquire certain material things, buy an automobile, buy a house, go off on vacation, and *occasionally* maybe they reflect on themselves philosophically. But to an alien it could look as though they were living an instinctive life, because their lives, though maybe somewhat more complicated than those of bees in beehives, are not very indicative of original thought. If you look at the great mass, people do live like that.

SHEFFIELD: A friend of mine recently

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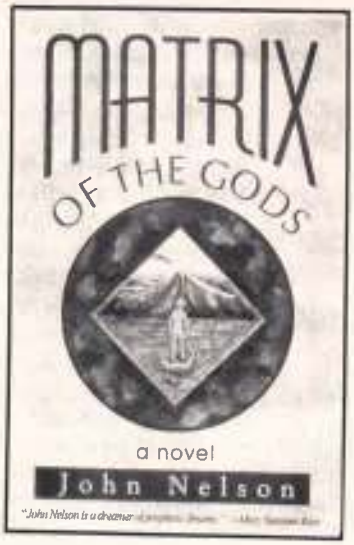

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showed me a quotation. It said, "An unconsidered life is worthless." And I said, "That's absolute rubbish! An unconsidered life is normal!" The less you think, the better you are, in some ways.

I want to go back to your earlier point, which is that there are stages to prove the existence of other intelligences. Stage one would be, let us discover any form of life, even if it's just bacteria, on some other world. Second, let us discover a single-celled organism. Then, let's discover a multicellular organism. Once you're at that point, you can see the road. You can say that the road to the development of intelligence is not a unique road that has happened only once on Earth, because we can see the precursor stages in other places. And then I would make the extrapolation very comfortably. If you get to multicellular animals in other places, then I would extrapolate very comfortably to the idea of other intelligences. But if I can never find the simplest life form anywhere else, then I consider I can't start the building process that would assure me that somewhere there's intelligence.

> One of my favorite theories is that aliens did come a long time ago, and they decided they didn't want to talk to us until we were smart...

SF AGE: So what are we likeliest to do should the spaceship show up? Are we going to blow it out of the sky, or are we going to let it crash into the side of the White House? What is the likeliest scenario when the contact comes?

SHEFFIELD: Let's set the groundwork. This is a situation in which the alien spaceship arrives in Earth orbit, a classical theme that has been used many many times. I think that most people will first disbelieve it; they will have a healthy dose of cynicism and skepticism. A few cities that will have to be obliterated or something before most people will believe. Remember, a large fraction of the American population does not believe that humans went to the Moon.

KONDO: Even if such should happen, they would blame it on the CIA.

SHEFFIELD: It will require an enormous effort to get people to believe that there are aliens in spaceships, even though they believe it now, at the UFO level, in tabloid newspapers. But to get the visceral feeling that this is a species comparable or superior to our own would require a big mental shift for most people. *We* at this table would do it dead easily. We've been thinking about this, thinking about aliens, just as we've been thinking about the future, for most of our lives. But the average person, as we said earlier, doesn't do any thinking about that, in fact, Yoji suggests, does no thinking of any kind. So the adjustment, I think, would take a long time before we really believed, yes, there really are aliens, it's not the CIA, it's not NSA, it's not Saddam Hussein, and now we have to reshape our lives to fit to that. Actually, we have great trouble reshaping our lives. I think we'd just continue doing what we're doing now.

ANDREWS: I think there are millions of people on Earth today who do believe that Earth is being visited and has been visited by aliens, and they're already perfectly willing to accept it. In the last twenty years, I have given many talks about UFOs; I used to be a consultant for a UFO organization hoping someday to get a piece of one, hoping that if one crashed or landed, we'd be called in to look at it.

People have asked why would they be here, if they are here. I always responded that I would have no idea. I don't even understand how Iraq works, so I certainly wouldn't understand how an alien culture would work.

But I wouldn't be surprised if they do exist here already, that they are already interacting with those people and doing those things that they wish to do. They may not be at all interested in human civilization and human society. We might not be a very interesting species to interact with. I've said in the past, if aliens came, they might be interested in our oil, who knows? Or they might be interested in harvesting human beings for meat. There are millions of people who disappear every year. Damon Knight's "To Serve Man" could be real. Maybe, like Charles Fort said, we're cattle.

So you could have aliens here, doing what they want to do, and we wouldn't know about it. And the way people are treated who report any of these things...we all ridicule it.

SHEFFIELD: I certainly do!

ANDREWS: I've been meaning to talk to you about that.

SHEFFIELD: I would be honestly amazed if there were any form of aliens creeping around on Earth with unadvertised presence. That's because I'm a cynic and a skeptic.

KONDO: Let me say that they could be here, but they could be sufficiently advanced that they do not recognize us as being very intelligent. There are a large number of people who believe that NASA is hiding dead aliens somewhere. They are serious. But if you understand anything at all about how tight the NASA budget is, if NASA had any brains at all in its hierarchy, they would not hide dead alien bodies. Because dead alien bodies would increase the NASA budget by a hundredfold.

SHEFFIELD: People have been saying since 1948 that the Air Force has aliens who crashed in New Mexico. Can you imagine the U.S. Government keeping a secret for forty-six years at that level of interest? They can't even keep a secret that is of no interest to anyone. I'll tell you an alien story that is true. During the Napoleonic wars, the natives of West Hartlepool in England hanged a monkey, believing it was a French spy. All you have to do to insult someone from West Hartlepool is to refer to hanging the monkey. They become very irritated, saying it's a foul slander. They don't say it's not true.

So an alien is relative. I remember a time when anybody of a different race was considered extremely strange. We never saw an Oriental or a black person. We only saw white people. We were frightened by black people and Oriental people. So I think that the first reaction to aliens is probably going to be fear. It's fear. We have a special word for it, xenophobia, the fear of strangers. And we would be leery indeed if any aliens popped up on the scene. We might try to kill them.

If we meet an alien intelligence forty years from now, my bet would be a thousand to one that we created it ourselves. In other words, I would go with Hans Moravec's argument that at the rate computer intelligence is developing, we will have other intelligences to talk to within fifty to one hundred years, and we will have made them.

Are they alien? I'm not sure that anything we make is really alien. I would suggest that if we made it, it will have our thought processes. It's not as alien as a *real* alien. However, it's certainly not human, and it's certainly not a carbon-based life form. Most people would probably say, yes, that's an alien. It just happened that we made it.

KONDO: Getting back to your original question of what we would do if aliens showed up in orbit, I think there's a good chance today that we could communicate with them. Especially if they are smart enough to come all the way across the gulf. If they can figure that out, they can figure out how to communicate with us, assuming that that is what they wish. We have no idea what they'd want. If they want to wipe us out, they'd probably have the ability to do so. Assuming that they are here for anthropological purposes other than eliminating us, I think at least a significant number of us would see the possibility of communicating with them. I don't know whether or not we'll succeed, but I think we'll make attempts.

SHEFFIELD: The CIA would try to keep their existence secret, the Defense Department would seek to destroy them, the State Department would bore them to the point where they'd go away. We seem to be somewhat skeptical about intelligent aliens showing up any time soon. We may detect that life exists on other planets around other stars, and we may make our own intelligences. But as for somebody showing up on our doorstep within fifty to one hundred years—the timing would be incredible. After all, we have just become a technological society, and life has been on Earth for three and a half billion

Continued on page 86

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By Dane Spotts

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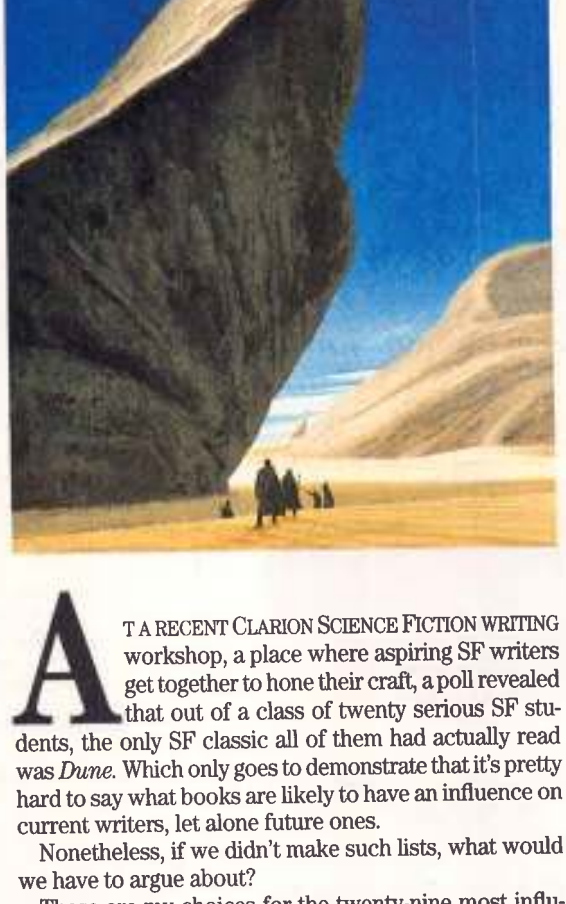
ESSAY

By John Kessel

It's time to load the canon with SF's most influential books.



Frank Herbert's Dune *is one of the field's most important and best-selling novels. Cover art by John Schoenherr.*

AT A RECENT CLARION SCIENCE FICTION WRITING workshop, a place where aspiring SF writers get together to hone their craft, a poll revealed that out of a class of twenty serious SF students, the only SF classic all of them had actually read was *Dune*. Which only goes to demonstrate that it's pretty hard to say what books are likely to have an influence on current writers, let alone future ones.

Nonetheless, if we didn't make such lists, what would we have to argue about?

These are my choices for the twenty-nine most influential SF works of the past twenty-nine years. These are *not* what I would consider the most "literarily ambitious" (though some are breakthrough originals); they're *not* the "best" (though many would be on my best list); *not* my "favorite" (though some I still enjoy after twenty years); *not* the "most popular" (though some were notable best-sellers), *not* the most likely to be remembered in fifty or a hundred years (some are already forgotten).

What you've got here is a list of those books that I estimate have had the greatest effect on the science fiction section of your local bookstore and the contents of the SF magazines. Often this effect has been indirect, through several generations of influence. And although I'm looking at the effect on science fiction, a fantasy book may be on this list if it has, in my opinion, had a major effect on SF.

Some other caveats: I've probably left off some obvious choices, books that, if you pointed them out to me, I'd slap my forehead and say, "Oops!" I've leaned toward short stories, because I think that's often where the influences first manifest themselves. Also, I haven't read every work of SF ever published. But given the necessarily subjective nature of this list, here, in rough order of their publication, is my best shot.

Let the games begin.

Cat's Cradle, by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. (1963): Despite his outsider status, Vonnegut's wild apocalypse was nominated for the Hugo Award. No one in the field had wielded gonzo satire as well as this 191-page book containing 127 chapters. Introduced ice nine, Bokonism. Its influence can be seen in writers from Norman Spinrad to Rudy Rucker to James Morrow to (even) John Kessel.

The Man in the High Castle, by Philip K. Dick (1963): Complex characters, multiple story lines, intricate plotting, reality breakdowns. The breakthrough Dick novel. Along with Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee*, popularized the alternate history as a part of the genre.

Dune, by Frank Herbert (1965): What's to argue about? Epic scope, historical sweep, godlike characters, ecology, sandworms, precognitive drugs, desert culture, nobility and intrigue on a distant future world in an ancient galactic civilization.

The Lord of the Rings, by J.R.R. Tolkien ("1965"): Although the trilogy originally appeared in the mid-fifties, it didn't gain a wide readership until the Ace and Ballantine paperback editions of the mid-sixties. This landmark quest fantasy fostered a whole genre of epic fantasy that has, for better or worse, exerted a magnetic pull on science fiction. History and language, quest framework, band of heroes, series, idealized reality, conservatism.

Dangerous Visions, edited by Harlan Ellison (1967): The shotgun blast of the American New Wave; stories, according to Ellison, that could not get published in the SF magazines of the day. All the best new writers, and old ones trying new stuff. Memorable works by Philip Jose Farmer, Samuel Delany, Fritz Leiber, Frederik Pohl, Norman Spinrad, and Roger Zelazny.

Picnic on Paradise, by Joanna Russ (1968): Russ' later *The Female Man* was more controversial, but this early series of stories about her female adventure heroine, Alyx, effortlessly and without polemics demonstrated that women could be heroes too. Russ' pioneering influence cannot be overestimated.

Stand on Zanzibar, by John Brunner (1968): The 1968 Hugo-winning novel, a mammoth multifaceted view of the overpopulated future, media-meltdown, technological and social change

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Popularized mainstream techniques borrowed from Dos Passos' *USA* trilogy and showed how they worked just fine in SF. A little-acknowledged forerunner of cyberpunk.

Lord of Light, by Roger Zelazny (1968): Zelazny had made his reputation already with a series of innovative stories and short novels, but this one blew the doors off the competition with its wit, scope and literary ambition. Uses a mythological framework for a science fiction conceit. The extraordinary man as hero. Some hints of the Amber series to come, though unkind people say the rest of his career hasn't lived up to this beginning.

Nova, by Samuel R. Delany (1968): Whatever mythological allusions weren't exploited by Zelazny you could count on Delany to allegorize into the galaxy. A jazzy space opera full of quirky characters, literary conceits, speculative physics and the most evocative language this side of the French symbolist poets. In 1968 Zelazny and Delany were the future of science fiction. Today's cyberpunks owe a debt to this novel, among others.

The Left Hand of Darkness, by Ursula K. Le Guin (1969): Would have to be near the top of any list of the most influential SF novels. Science Fiction that works on almost every level: anthropological detail, multiple complex narrators, characters that stand up and cast shadows, beautiful prose, effective plot, gender exploration. Fulfills genre traditions while pointing to new possibilities for the future.

Dying Inside, by Robert Silverberg (1970): I might have selected a number of other Silverberg titles of this era: *A Time of Changes*, *The Book of Skulls*, *Downward to the Earth*. *Dying Inside* revisits the classic story of the mind-reading superman, adds existential angst, and places him in a very real New York City. Silverberg at his most serious and literate, showing the way for a later generation of writers.

Chronopolis, by J.G. Ballard (1960s, collected 1971): Ballard's deracinated heroes wander through blasted landscapes full of technological artifacts shorn of their original purposes. Some of the chilling distance of Wells or Clarke; human beings are very small. Even the titles resonate with anomie: "The Voices of Time," "The Drowned Giant," "The Terminal Beach," "Now Wakes the Sea." Writers as various as Bruce Sterling and Connie Willis have spoken of their debt to Ballard.

Ringworld, by Larry Niven (1971): Idea makes setting makes story. Pioneers what Roz Kaveny has called the "Big Dumb Object" SF novel. The science may be a little wobbly in places, but the concept of the Ringworld is so large that it almost doesn't matter what characters or story Niven yokes to it. But Louis Wu, Teela Brown, and their companions remain colorful, and the implications of the discovery of such a cosmic artifact have powered many another SF novel.

334, by Thomas Disch (1972): In this series of linked stories, Disch brought *New Yorker* literary polish to future SF, and in the final long story he creates a netsuke of characters, plot and setting so intricate it has never been equaled in the genre. Hip to all levels of New York life from the street to the penthouses, Disch sets his ordinary twenty-first century people forth with heavy irony. The humanist SF writers of a later generation were all Disch readers, and though none of the cyberpunks ever mention this book as an influence, I wonder.

> ...here is a list of those books that I estimate have had the greatest effect on the science fiction section of your local bookstore...

The Mote in God's Eye, by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle (1974): Space opera, galactic empire, fascinating aliens, hard science mind twisters, military heroes, evolutionary competition and humanity triumphant by the skin of its teeth. What more could a boy ask for?

The Iron Dream, by Norman Spinrad (1973): A science fiction novel written by an Adolf Hitler who, instead of becoming a dictator, moved to the U.S. and became an SF writer. An alternate history trope that has since become corrupted to the point of triviality—famous people in other careers. But more important as a satire on SF's political/social illnesses, a penetrating view of certain forms of SF as an acting out of psychological disease.

The Infinity Box, by Kate Wilhelm (1973): Although the issue of her commitment or lack of commitment to feminism distracted some, Kate Wilhelm, along with Disch, demonstrated the value of contemporary mainstream techniques in the SF short story. Three-dimensional characters, fine prose, intriguing plots, political awareness and emotional power. Influence writ large in the work of Kress, Fowler, Kelly, Robinson, Rusch, Goldstein, Murphy and a host of others.

The Fifth Head of Cerberus, by Gene Wolfe (1973): Wait a minute! Doesn't Cerberus have only three heads? Mystery, culture, complex characters. Wolfe's breakthrough. An intricate novel comprised of three interwoven novellas. Creates at least two completely believable alien worlds, a labyrinth of personal identity and moral ambiguity. Proustian SF.

The Forever War, by Joe Haldeman (1974): Military SF by a Vietnam veteran. Cynical about the military structure, sympathetic to the common soldier, personally optimistic and socially disillusioned, Haldeman draws his anti-heroes through a millennium of drastic change. For a brief time, when these stories appeared in *Analog* in the early seventies, readers thought there was life in the old girl yet. Haldeman brought literacy to a new generation of hard science fiction.

Her Smoke Rose Up Forever, by James Tiptree, Jr. (1970s, collected 1990): James Tiptree, Jr., a pseudonym for Dr. Alice Sheldon, in a decade or so of brilliant stories, explored themes of biological determinism, psychological evolution, and a feminism based on a dark view of the evolutionary imperatives of male and female behavior. Some of the trickiest SF stories ever written; her best start at mundane point A and arrive, after a series of clever turns, at some harrowing paradox. Explosive with implication, they move from discomfort to revelation—and from there, frequently, to death.

The Sword of Shannara, by Terry Brooks (1976): There's gold in them thar hills. This no doubt sincerely intended Xerox of Tolkien showed publishers the way to the bank, and they haven't stopped since. Multiplies the deforming effect of *The Lord of the Rings* on SF by a factor of ten. *Aprés moi, le deluge.*

Star Wars, by George Lucas (1977): *Aprés moi, le swamp.* Reinvents thirties space opera for the late seventies, hugely expanding SF's audience while setting the genre back forty years. Heroes and villains, derring-do, rubber science or no science at all. Ask yourself why sixty percent of SF today arises out of the media.

The Persistence of Vision, by John Varley (1978): Varley hit the field like Heinlein reborn for the seventies. On the surface were stories of can-do citizens of the solar system, but beneath the glitter was a somber future history of humans evicted from the Earth by aliens and still managing to cope. One of the first writers to explore the psychological and sexual implications of cloning. The title story won the Nebula and Hugo awards; "Air Raid" was made into the film *Millennium.*

Hammer's Slammers, by David Drake (1979): Along with Pournelle's Falkenberg stories, this book established the commercial popularity of military SF. Vietnam vet Drake's hard-bitten mercenary soldiers have no illusions about the virtue of the causes they fight for, but they know how to get the job done. From this comes an entire subgenre of combat SF books, much of them bloody Rambo fantasies with laser cannons, written by people with none of the direct experience of Drake.

Neuromancer, by William Gibson (1984): Another automatic choice. It's getting hard to remember the size of the risks Gibson took when he wrote this one. Glitz, polished crammed prose, antiheroes, a cosmopolitan background, a new future and, for all its energy, in the end a remarkably sad and evocative loneliness. *Noir* SF. What it feels like to live on the edge of the technosphere with no connections to anyone; a lot of people found romantic images of themselves in Case and Molly.

Schismatrix/Crystal Express, by Bruce Sterling (1985/89): In the Shaper/Mechanist series, "Chairman Bruce" set forth his version of cyberpunk. Sterling had published two novels before *Schismatrix*, but when this one appeared, Norman Spinrad hailed it not as future shock, but "future blitzkrieg." Cyborgs vs. bioengineers in a solar system where the Earth is a backwater and the human race is fragmenting into multiple subraces. More ideas per page than anyone since Stapledon, and he can write. Engaging characters, irony, and humor adorn fundamental challenges to humanist pieties.

Fire Watch, by Connie Willis (1985): Humanist pieties, with the knife hidden beneath the velvet surface. Somehow Willis convinced everyone she was just like their big sister, when she's really a deadly unsympathetic observer of humans' mutual destruction—when she's not writing the deftest comedy since P.G. Wodehouse. Brilliant plotting, sleight of hand, subtle characters. "All My Darling Daughters," "Fire Watch," "A Letter From the Clearys," "Blued Moon."

The Jaguar Hunter, by Lucius Shepard (1987): Magic realism, hothouse exoticism, street life, the third world; hustlers, losers, politics, hallucinations, and SF. In stories like "R&R," "A Spanish Lesson," and "Salvador," Shepard wielded ornate prose to probe the moral dilemmas of complex people living completely outside of middle class America. Struggles for physical, emotional and moral survival in a world where you can't have all three at once.

Red Mars, by Kim Stanley Robinson (1992): This one's so recent it's hard to predict, but I'll put my money on it (and its sequels *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*) as the most likely of the recent spate of Mars novels to have a lasting influence. Using the latest in scientific research, Robinson sets forth a multigeneration epic of the terraforming and political transformation of Mars. Hard SF, epic scope, politics, real characters. Most notably, Robinson gives us a Martian landscape so lovingly realized you wonder if he's been there.

So there it is. It might be interesting to select *nongenre* books that have influenced the field (from William Burroughs to Gabriel Garcia Marquez), or *nonfiction* books (from *Future Shock* to *The Engines of Creation*). Fortunately, that's not my job.

Looking at this list I can see the case for writers I've left out: Aldiss, Benford, Card, Bear, and many others. And if you're talking influence, what about the older writers whose later novels reached an entirely new audience, in the seventies and eighties? A generation of readers has arisen who've never read Clarke before *2001*, for whom *Time Enough for Love* is the earliest Heinlein novel they know, and *The Robots of Dawn* is the first encounter they ever had with Asimov's Lije Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw.

As for the shape of things to come—what, you expect me to predict the future? □

It was the dawn of the third age of mankind... and the last best hope for peace is the last of the Babylon stations.
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The notorious (and notoriously inept) space criminals Vossoff and Nimmitz had finally hatched a foolproof scheme. As always, however, there was just one small problem....

JUST A COUPLE OF EXTINCT ALIENS RIDING AROUND IN A LIMO

BY ADAM-TROY CASTRO

Illustration by Joel Naprstek

Looking for employment in extraterrestrial want ads is always risky. Nine times out of ten, they're seeking organ donors for their finer restaurants.

But looking for employment in extraterrestrial want ads when you're a pair of notorious criminals hunted in half the civilized universe and despised laughingstocks in the other half, and so low on cash that you debase yourself by collecting the sentient deposit bottles that run wild on the littered streets of

"That's the Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss. A moist, grayish-black creature, indigenous to the subterranean volcanic caves on Pylthothus III, it spent its ten-million-year lifespan clinging to stone walls, dripping acidic slime, emitting incessant bloodcurdling screams, and feeding off the vile sulphurous fumes that constantly belch forth from the planet's molten depths."

P'psi VII, is so clearly an invitation to disaster that even Vossoff and Nimmitz should have known better. However, they were desperate; their last scheme, a failed attempt to loot the fabled advanced civilization of Fyliss IV (where they'd still be stranded if they hadn't been lucky enough to hitch a ride on a robotic interplanetary bookmobile), had cost the pair their starship, their pride in their reputations, and everything they'd ever managed to steal; and they'd been eking out a meager existence on P'psi's mean streets ever since.

It was Vossoff who discovered a possible way out, late one night while scrolling through a stolen copy of the local newspad in search of the few jobs a human being could hold without the amputation or grafting-on of limbs. He woke Nimmitz. "Hey."

Nimmitz, who'd been deep in a nightmare about aliens who talk about nothing but easy chairs, woke groggily. "What."

"You and I are about to become parents."

Nimmitz sat up at once, his normally tiny eyes bulging with revulsion and terror. "Jeez, Ernst, I swear to God I didn't know that was the way it worked on this planet!"

"Keep your mind out of the gutter, swine. I'm referring to the want ads. Check out this beauty: *NEED OBSCENELY VAST AMOUNTS OF CASH IN A HURRY? ADOPT AN EXTINCT ALIEN. Many species available, no actual work involved. We pay for all filing costs, transportation, future expenses, plus a habitable planet engineered to your specifications, and a ten-billion credit honorarium. No time travel involved; references not required. Contact Miss Melinda Haversham, Charles Darwin Clearinghouse for Extinct Alien Species, care of* blahblahblahblah. Did you hear that, my oafish friend? Ten billion credits, a free planet engineered to our specifications, and no work required! This time tomorrow we'll be well on our way to riches!"

Nimmitz eyed the newspad warily. "I don't know, Ernst. It sounds too easy to me."

Vossoff sneered, thumbing the glowing spot on the screen to instantly print out a hard copy. "Adopting an extinct alien species? Why would you expect it to be hard?"

AND, INDEED, THE ACTUAL MECHANICS OF THE adoption turned out to be not difficult at all. All Vossoff had to do was enter the nearest hytex, punch in the toll-free number in the ad, assure the AI receptionist that he had spent long days and nights wrestling with his conscience over the plight of all the—(here he went overboard sobbing)—poor, pathetic, extinct alien species out there. His conscience left him no choice, he said, but to accept ten billion credits and a free planet in their memory.

He wasn't off the hytex for ten seconds before a sleek hyperspace limo, three P'psian city blocks long, materialized at the curb, its wet bar and disgustingly servile crew waiting. Vossoff hopped in at once, Nimmitz only after searching the sky above for the falling anvil he expected the universe to arrange any minute soon.

The trip took a week. Vossoff spent most of it in a merry state of inebriation, flirting with the flight attendants and thoroughly enjoying himself despite Nimmitz' constant niggling about the (thus far) purely theoretical anvil.

At the end of the line, the limo deposited them on a lovely little planet of brilliant blue skies and rolling green meadows where an angelic little old lady wearing a pink shawl of real Earth wool sat sweetly knitting on the porch of her adorable little red schoolhouse.

Nimmitz was paralyzed. "It's a trap. She's going to eat us."

"Nonsense," said Vossoff. "She doesn't have the proper jaw structure. Isn't it more reasonable to assume that she's actually going to do what the ad said and pay us the equivalent of a planetary treasury, just for doing absolutely nothing?"

"Because she looks like my Aunt Rose," said Nimmitz, "and my Aunt Rose would eat us."

Which was true; Vossoff remembered reading something about it in the tabloids a few years back. He shook his head to clear his mind of the foul image. "Let me handle this. You don't know how to talk to people."

THE ANGELIC LITTLE OLD LADY WAS, OF COURSE, MISS MELINDA HAVERsham, founder and administrator of the Charles Darwin Clearinghouse for Extinct Alien Species...and she was so overjoyed to meet Vossoff and Nimmitz that the pair had to suffer through almost an hour of tedious small talk about orchids before she finally got down to the real reason for their meeting. "Yes," she said. "You read the ad correctly. Ten billion credits and ownership of a customized planet just for agreeing to adopt an Extinct Alien Species."

"That's insanely generous," noted Vossoff.

She adjusted her bifocals. "Well, we're a nonprofit organization. Being insanely generous is what we're all about."

"Do you mind me asking where all the money comes from?"

"Well, it *is* a rude question, but not one I particularly mind answering. We're a special public-service project of Bettelhine Munitions."

Nimmitz almost spilled his tea on the rug. "You can't mean the fiends responsible for the *Ultimate Dreadnought!*"

"The very same," chuckled Miss Haversham.

EXPLORE THE COSMOS FROM THE COMFORT OF YOUR LIVING ROOM

You're in your Barca Lounger. Staring at the walls. Suddenly you're thrust into a swirling nebula light years from home. Was it a UFO encounter? Something you ate? Nah, you were just staring at the space art of world-renowned glass painter Michael David Ward. Using paint and solvents - which he'll light on fire to create a sense of motion-along with meteorite dust, Ward has moved space art from science books into galleries. And by calling 1-800-444-1701, you can move these officially licensed limited edition prints it into your home. Then kick back and visit a distant galaxy, secure in the fact that your refrigerator is full and close by.

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Vossoff and Nimmitz met each other's eyes. Even they had been horrified by the capabilities of the Bettelhine *Ultimate Dreadnought*...a warship the size of a small sun, that required the natural resources of a thousand planets just to build, bankrupted a hundred planetary treasuries just to finance, and was capable of routinely scooping up entire inhabited planets just to fire them like cannonballs. Rumor had it that the entire population of the evil warlike race that had commissioned it was still wandering about aimlessly inside, in fruitless search for the hidden control room that would enable them to conquer everybody.

"Mr. Bettelhine always felt guilty about that," Miss Haversham admitted. "Not about the *Dreadnought*, of course, since it was after all never used, but for all the other fine Bettelhine Munitions products that have laid waste to so many planets across the galaxy, at reasonable prices that even the budget rampaging warmonger could afford. As partial atonement, he endowed the Clearinghouse...a place dedicated to the memory of all the intelligent alien races wiped out by his company. Here, compassionate sentients like yourselves can be paid handsomely for offering their last respects to the memory of all these noble races so violently expunged from the universe."

"It's certainly enough to bring a tear to my eye," agreed Vossoff. "When do we get paid handsomely?"

"Why, as soon as you decide which extinct alien species to adopt." She passed Vossoff a book. "There are over a hundred needy candidates pictured in this catalogue. We have another ten thousand on file in our library. You can, if you wish, stay here as our guests while researching the extinct alien species that most fits your aesthetic standards..."

"Ernst..." said Nimmitz. "I don't like this place, Ernst."

Vossoff ignored him and examined the catalogue, which had a cover as gut-wrenchingly purple as the molten rock that the terrible cannibal leeches of Terrix V use to balm their throats during their frequent stomach upsets. When he opened the cover, he discovered that it was a holographic pop-up projector, with startlingly realistic 3-D representations of various extinct alien species eagerly leaping from its pages like vaudeville performers desperate to catch a producer's eye. Within seconds, he had seen a four-legged creature with a pair of tiny heads waving at the end of long serpentine necks...a tusked humanoid with four arms...and a pulpy mass packed inside some kind of huge seed pod. None of these specimens particularly struck him as great losses to the great galactic gene pool, but he supposed that didn't matter. He wouldn't need to harbor genuine affection for any of them in order to claim the hefty award for an adoption. Still, rather than decide too quickly and possibly jeopardize the deal, he made a big show of pretending that he really cared which extinct alien species he and Nimmitz chose....

Halfway through the catalogue, he found that it did matter. "Well, what do you know. This is interesting. Here, Nimmitz. Isn't this interesting?"

Nimmitz goggled. "It's disgusting, is what it is."

"Oh, no, I'm not referring to the species itself...which," he added, to reassure Miss Haversham, "I must admit, truly looks like a noble and handsome race. No, I'm referring to the little red notation at the bottom of the page, which says that choosing this particular species doubles the stipend. Can that possibly be so?"

Miss Haversham took a look. "Ah, yes," she said, daintily wiping a tear from the corner of one eye. "That's the Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss. Truly, one of our most deserving cases. A moist, grayish-black creature, indigenous to the subterranean volcanic caves on Pylthothus III, it spent its ten-million-year lifespan clinging to stone walls, dripping acidic slime, emitting incessant bloodcurdling screams, and feeding off the vile sulphurous fumes that constantly belch forth from the planet's molten depths. When first discovered by a mining expedition, only two centuries ago, the Stink-Moss was thought to be just another foul-smelling Pylthothi plant, but further study revealed an intelligent, sensitive creature with a highly advanced social structure, that communicated with others of its kind via a highly sophisticated language primarily composed of toxic gaseous wastes. Alas, the entire population perished when the planet was blown up as an icebreaker during a Bettelhine Corporate Bonding Session of a few years ago...."

"Go figure," mourned Vossoff. "And they had everything to live for too. But despite the unlimited inherent fascination of your interminably long and unbearably heart-rending tale, which we certainly appreciate, you still haven't answered the question I actually asked. To rephrase: have you really doubled the standard compensation for adopting this particular extinct species?"

"Yes, sir, we have. We did that because the Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss is truly a hardship case. Most adoption applicants only have sympathy for extinct alien species either close to their own genotype, like the wide selection of humanoids at our disposal, or cute extinct alien species, like unicorns or time otters or balls of fur that purr mindlessly when stroked. The Pylthothi, on the other hand, were unique in the universe, had no sympathizers close to their genotype, and were almost pathologically uncute, being in fact so vile in every way that nobody wants to be associated with them, even in memory. Personally, I don't even like looking at that page."

"Neither do I," said Nimmitz. "Let's go, Ernst."

"Not yet," said Vossoff. He flipped the page, found an unbearably adorable pink lemur-thing with soulful eyes that could wrench tears from a stone, yawned with boredom, and turned his attention back to the Pylthothi. They were revolting, all right. And yet, that wonderful stipend...

...Vossoff sighed. He hated to admit it, but for once in his singly brain celled life, Nimmitz was right. There had to be a catch.

He said, "Let me get this straight. Twenty billion credits and a customized planet...just for adopting this species."

"Yes," said Miss Haversham.

"This *extinct* species."

"That is correct."

"This uncommonly awful, thoroughly unpleasant species."

"Yes, sir."

"This species so completely expunged from the universe that this hologram is all that remains."

"Yes, sir."

"You're sure they're extinct, now."

"Yes, sir."

"You don't have any stray Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss sharing their charms with your back offices?"

"No, sir."

"There are no previously undiscovered specimens that will be peeled off the wallpaper and dumped on our laps the second we sign the contract?"

"None, sir. There's no Pylthothi, anywhere."

"You're *certain*."

Miss Havisham's eyes were starting to glaze. "Yes, sir."

Vossoff hesitated. "Forgive me for harping on this, ma'am, but...well, my partner and I have been burned before. You're, ah, *absolutely* sure you're not going to surprise us with survivors you didn't know about until now, that my friend Nimmitz and I will then be contractually obligated to care for for the rest of our lives?"

"Yes, sir. We are unstinting in our research, and we know for a fact that there are now no more living or dead Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss remaining anywhere in the known universe. If you wish, I could provide you with a legal document absolving you and your friend Nimmitz of your end of the bargain if this turns out to be literally untrue."

"So you don't expect us to actually care for this flatulent fungus."

"No, sir. All you have to do is sign the papers certifying that you've officially adopted this extinct species, accept the check, and take a quick jaunt across the quadrant to sign for your customized planet. We do the rest."

"May I ask, then...what's the point?"

"Memory," sighed Miss Haversham. "There are just so many extinct alien species out there...or rather, I should say, no longer out there. Too many for the universe to much note or long remember. But if we can pay people like you to adopt these species, even in those cases when you think the species in question are vile and disgusting, then we can keep the memory burning a little while longer. Or, to put it

another way, gentlemen, by adopting this species, you are agreeing to be their monument. As for us, we get a tremendous tax break this way."

"And that's it," said Vossoff.

"That's it," agreed Miss Haversham.

Vossoff licked his lips, ran his hand over his great bald head, and turned to Vossoff. "Sounds pretty straightforward to me."

Nimmitz said, "Me too. I'm leaving."

FORTUNATELY—OR UNFORTUNATELY, DEPENDing on the depth of your personal convictions about people getting what they deserve—Vossoff had always been the controlling stockholder in this particular partnership. They signed the papers. They adopted the Pylthothi species. They accepted a check for 20 billion credits. And after a sumptuous home-cooked dinner (marred only by the strangely disagreeable aftertaste of the garlic bread), they boarded the space limo and departed in triumph, having started the day as a pair of hasbeen bums and ended it as two of the wealthiest men in the civilized galaxy.

Vossoff was so dazed by his easy victory, and Nimmitz so obsessed with searching for that elusive plummeting anvil, that it was all of four hours before either one of them noticed a faint odor. Nimmitz went off to complain to the engineer; Vossoff simply ignored it and watched a spellbindingly bad in-flight movie made by some misguided alien producers who had thought they could duplicate an old-fashioned terran Western using an all extraterrestrial cast. He thought the Aldebaranian squid-thing cast as Wyatt Earp (and wearing a standard-issue tin star and white hat) was worth the price of admission all by itself. Still, even that palled after a while, and before long Vossoff dozed off and enjoyed his favorite dream, in which he dove headfirst into a vast ocean of glittering cold coins. He'd been having this dream for years now, often at times of extreme poverty, when possessing even one of those coins would have seemed an improvement, and the dream had always betrayed him by having all that beautiful money taken away from him at the last minute, usually (for reasons that would always escape him) by a strangely muttonchopped alien duck. Tonight, however, the dream ended differently. Tonight, the ocean of money melted in his hands, and the tropical skies darkened, and the world around him turned into a dark and forbidding underground chamber, billowing with thick clouds of bad-smelling alien gas.

'WHILE THEY WERE totally alien physically, the Pylthothi possessed an inborn aesthetic standard almost identical to humanity's. They were nauseated by the way they looked, sickened by the way they smelled, and utterly horrified by the way they lived. Most of all, they were tormented by the ten-million-year lifespan they had to suffer through.'

Then he woke up and discovered that it was not entirely a dream. The odor was getting worse.

He was actually elated, because this gave him an opportunity to complain himself. And not with the humiliating hesitant politeness of a man with modest savings, but with the thundering, arrogant, unreasonable tantrum of a man with vast quantities of money. He could be as insulting and obnoxious as he wanted, ripping fragile egos to bloody shreds, without even a scintilla of fear that anybody would jettison him from the airlock in retribution, as had always happened when he acted that way before. No, he was going to be a monster, and they were going to bow and scrape and take it. That, as he'd always understood it, was what being obscenely rich was all about.

He slipped on a robe and strode from his quarters into the main lounge, where he found an exhausted Nimmitz sitting at the passenger terminal, scrolling through shipboard reference files.

"What's wrong with you?" Vossoff raged. "Don't you smell anything wrong with the air?"

Nimmitz didn't turn from the screen. "I complained again half an hour ago. The engineer assures me there's nothing wrong."

"And you accepted that? Is this ship really supposed to reek like a voshnoi stable?"

Nimmitz shrugged. "He said it's just the way it smells in here, that's all. I made him promise to take another look at the air purifiers anyway."

"He'd better if he wants to keep his job!" Vossoff snarled weakly, his enthusiasm already fading. Nimmitz was just no fun being irate at, that's all; the man had no talent for it. After a moment, more to break the silence than anything else, Vossoff said, "So what are you reading, anyway?"

"Encyclopedia article. All about the Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss."

It took Vossoff a second to recognize the phrase. "For Quarn's sake, why?"

Nimmitz averted his eyes. "Because we adopted the species. I figured it's...like...our responsibility or something."

"You're out of your mind. If some whacked-out munitions magnate decides to salve his troubled conscience by handing out free fortunes, I don't particularly feel the need to make it a high school research project."

"Maybe not," said Nimmitz, "but do you know the real reason the Pylthothi screamed incessantly?"

"Is this a new kind of ethnic joke? Very well. What was the real reason the Pylthothi screamed incessantly?"

"According to this article, it's because... well, let me read this part

Continued on page 87

DREAD VENGEANCE

BY LAWRENCE WATT-EVANS
Illustration by Michael Dubisch

In trying to teach the aliens, Anna Twombley learned a dangerous lesson herself.

THE EARTHMAN IN THE HOLOGRAPHIC IMAGE WAS SMALL AND SCRUFFY, a scraggly growth of beard scraping at the air filter that covered his mouth and nose, greasy fingerprints on his dark goggles; he staggered slightly as if intoxicated—or already wounded.

He was hurrying, fleeing across an alien courtyard, and the image moved with him, the camera following his flight.

Behind the Earthman came a dozen or more creatures even smaller than himself, moving on four legs apiece, each holding something in its prehensile snout; sunlight whiter and sharper than anything that had ever shone on Earth glittered from mica-bearing paving stones and blades edged with volcanic glass.

The Earthman glanced back, his expression hidden by his protective gear, and quickened his pace, but that only served to trap him in the narrow end of the cul-de-sac courtyard that much sooner. He turned, a beast at bay, casting about for something he could use as a weapon in his defense.

A flung stone struck his shoulder; he started back, the filter-mask moving as he shouted, and stooped to retrieve it.

Another stone caught him on the side of his head as he did so, throwing him off-

balance and knocking his goggles out of line.

He caught himself against the wall to keep from falling, and reached up with his free hand to straighten the crooked eyepiece.

Another stone caught him on the hand; blood gleamed a vivid red as he dove for a stone.

The next missile bounced squarely off one lens, but he ignored it as he regained his feet, a shard of rock in his fist.

The creatures were closing in, and when they saw the weapon they ceased their slow torment; a hail of stone battered at him.

The goggles flew off, and he flung an arm across sun-blinded eyes; his scream loosened the filter-mask. Blood streaked his hair and trickled down his jumpsuit. He fell.

The arrival of the military airsled two minutes later, its flashing multicolored lights only dimly visible in the glare of the white sun, was an anticlimax; the attackers were already fleeing, and the Earthman was obviously quite dead. His crumpled body sprawled awkwardly against the wall. Blood from a hundred wounds trickled from nose, mouth, and eyes, and pooled on the cobbles.

As the airsled's human crew emerged and began efficiently cleaning up the mess and gathering the corpse aboard, a deep voice spoke.

"This incident was recorded by one of the automatic cameras studying the city at the time; unfortunately, the equipment had not yet been programmed to automatically summon help at the sight of a bleeding human, and only the failure of the victim's heart, reported by the required internal monitor carried by all off-Earth personnel, alerted the emergency crew. The victim was beyond hope of revival by the time help reached him."

The scene cut abruptly to a shot of the same Earthman, alive, sitting at ease and speaking to a woman behind a desk.

"The victim was Alan McCrae, an unskilled volunteer attached to the mission. He had been dismissed from his position and was awaiting transportation back to Earth at the time of the incident. Later investigation revealed that he had used the free time resulting from his unemployment to swindle several of the local inhabitants, selling them 'medicine' which proved to be whiskey cut with sugar-water. The metabolism of the Sh'chinei reacts badly to alcohol, and a young female died of McCrae's medicine, precipitating the attack. None of the Sh'chinei reported McCrae's actions prior to the attack; had they done so, McCrae would have been bound over for trial and in all likelihood turned over to the Sh'chinei for punishment."

Another cut, to eight men and women seated about a table.

"Despite the circumstances, the Council refused to alter the official policy. A human life had been lost, and policy requires that the killing of any human by any nonhuman sentient must be promptly avenged, in the interests of preventing recurrences. Accordingly, the Sh'chinei city was destroyed."

The scene changed again, and the audience watched in horror as the strange town

Continued on page 44

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DREAD VENGEANCE

Continued from page 43

vanished in a fireball even brighter than the light of that world's white-dwarf sun. The burning cloud rose ominously upward on a tower of flame, then spread horizontally in what any Earthman would recognize as a mushroom cloud.

"The results were satisfactory," the narrator said calmly, as a camera panned across glowing, molten ruins beneath darkened skies and a rain of black ash. "The surviving Sh'chinei were warned that a second incident would result in the destruction of their entire civilization."

"By every power," one of the watchers hissed in its native tongue, "how can this be so?"

"For a single murderer they did this!" another replied.

"SUPPOSE," SAID A THIRD, "that we had not seen this, and an Earthperson had slain one of our own young. Would we not have slain him in turn and perhaps all died as a result? Let us thank the powers that allowed us to see this record in time!"

"Dare we continue to deal with the Earthpeople?" the second asked.

"I think that we can," the third replied. "Did not our friend Anna Twombley bring us to see this record, though she was told not to? Some among the Earthpeople wish us well, and surely the benefits to be derived from trade with them are obvious. But oh, we must be cautious!"

"We must spread the news among all our people," said the first. "No Earthperson may be harmed, under any circumstances."

"Agreed," said the second.

"Agreed," said the third.

"We must leave before the Earthpeople find us here," the second said; the others clapped their consent, and together they left the little viewing room that Anna Twombley had elaborately smuggled them into.

From another viewing room, Twombley watched the results of her handiwork. "Not bad," she said, leaning on the back of her younger companion's chair.

"I couldn't follow it," the young man replied. "To me that language of theirs just sounds like white noise."

"I can play it back and translate, if you like, Bill."

The young man looked at the third human, an older man in a military uniform. The soldier shook his head.

"Don't bother," the younger man said, "We'll take your word for it."

Twombley leaned forward to hit the stop-and-rewind tab. "I don't think we'll have any problems at all with these people from now on," she said. "They're good and scared."

"That's the whole idea," the older man said. He leaned back in his chair, satisfied.

Bill frowned. "You know, Colonel, Anna, some day we're going to hit a culture that has a movie industry of its own and knows as much about special effects as we do, and when that happens, this little stunt isn't going to work."

Anna shrugged. "It might work anyway. How could they be sure it was a simulation? Would they dare call our bluff?"

"They might," the young man said. He hesitated. "You know, it occurs to me, Anna—is it really a bluff? Would we retaliate like that?"

"We don't have to—no one's going to call us, not after they see the recordings."

"How do we know? These are aliens we're dealing with."

"They still have an instinct for self-preservation—that's universal."

"Is it? Well, I suppose so." He shrugged. "Still, seems to me there are plenty of times in human history when bluffs have been called. Sometimes they were bluffs, sometimes they weren't." He studied the player with interest. Then his expression changed as an idea struck him.

He glanced at the colonel, then asked uneasily, "Do we even know for sure that this holo is faked?"

Anna stared at him, then she too threw a quick glance at the colonel, who was sitting silently, listening, with an odd half-smile on his face.

"Of course it is!" Anna said. "Of course it's a bluff! We wouldn't nuke millions of intelligent beings over one human! It's unthinkable!"

"Hey, relax," Bill said. "I'm just throwing ideas around, thinking out loud."

"Well, stop it. It's…it's…" She turned away, unable to find the right word, and picked up her beltpack; her eyes wandered back to the holographic cartridge in the player.

"Unthinkable?" the younger man asked, following her gaze.

"Of course it is!" she repeated, "We'd never do it. The public would never stand for it."

"Not if they knew," the young man said, with another glance at the colonel.

"You're saying we'd lie to our own people?"

"Why not? We lie to *them*," Bill said, gesturing at the player.

"We'd never do it!" Anna insisted. She strode to the door. Then she paused and turned back to look at the two men, her eyes worried.

"Would we?" she asked.

The two men glanced at one another. The colonel crossed his arms over his chest. Anna felt as if a weight had just settled on her own chest.

"Have we?" she asked.

Bill shrugged.

"You don't want to know," the colonel said. □

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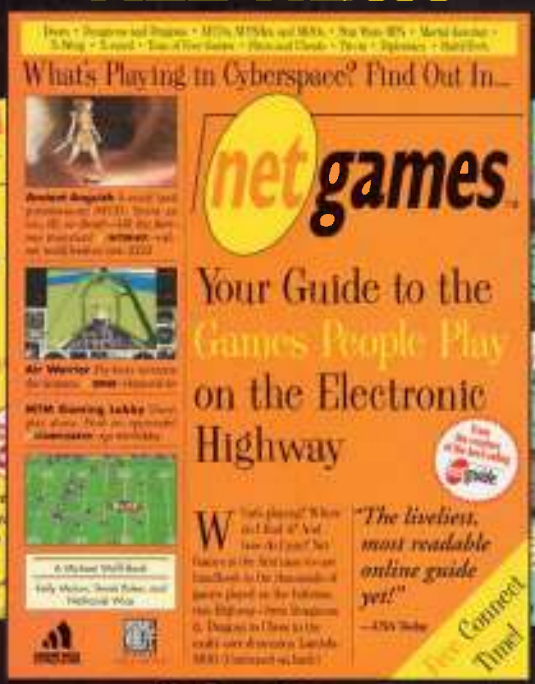

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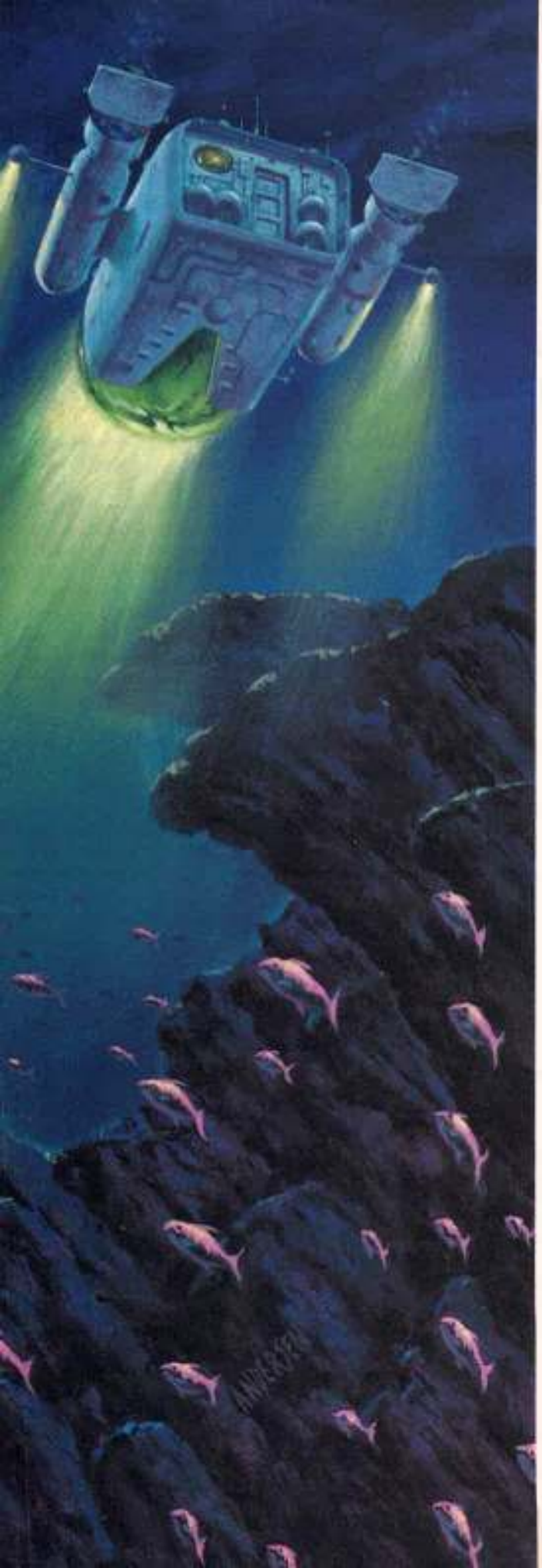

For centuries, the sea creature had lived peacefully in the hidden depths of the Atlantic Ocean. Then we came along.

JONATHAN LIVINGSTONE SEASLUG

BY ALLEN STEELE

Illustration by Doug Andersen

"Another mystery…is the Great Sea Serpent. Most zoologists would be quite willing to admit that large unidentified marine creatures may exist—perhaps, as in the case of the coelacanth, even survivors from primeval times. And if they are still around, one day we should be able to prove it."

— Arthur C. Clarke

IN HINDSIGHT, PERHAPS IT SHOULDN'T BE A TOTAL SURPRISE that we found Jonathan. Myths of sea monsters have been with us for a long time, after all: the kraken, which some marine scientists believe may be based upon sightings of giant squid—themselves once only a legend—by Scandinavian sailors, and the worm Uroboros, which the ancient Greeks said was a serpent so long that it wrapped its tail entirely around the world. Similarly, the Norse had Jormungard, which was essentially Uroboros in Viking disguise, while the Muslims had the zaratan, which also shows up in medieval Anglo-Saxon literature. During the last century there was Nessie, which the Scots held onto as a major tourist attraction even after it was debunked as a clever hoax perpetrated by a local physician and a couple of schoolboys; meanwhile, *Jaws* continued to frighten Americans until the last of the Great Whites was hunted into extinction.

All these creatures were great, formidable monsters with razor-sharp teeth and insatiable appetites, who struck without warning or provocation, assaulting hapless vessels and taking screaming sailors in their coils to the icy depths below. Yet the more humankind explored the oceans, the fewer of these leviathans we tended to find, until all that was left was half-remembered folklore and quaint sea chanteys, plus the occasional Hollywood horror movie. Even orca finally managed to live down their rep as killer whales—unless, of course, penguins and seals are polled for their opinions—while humpbacks and sperm whales elicit more sympathy than fear.

Perhaps it's only appropriate that when we did finally discover a *bona fide* sea monster, it took a form appropriate for the twenty-first century.

You've got to remember the way things stood on April 15, 2024, when Jack Hughes and I discovered Jonathan. Nautilus had been

established only two years earlier by AquaCorp, and already the company was losing a ton of money. Sure, the tourist trade was good—every week another cruise ship sailed into harbor and deposited a few hundred vacationers on the artificial island—but it was the colony's only enterprise which was making significant returns on the $10-billion investment. Our competitors on the Pacific Rim were undercutting the fishing trade by selling their catches at cost, and the Japanese fish-farms were socking it to everyone else. The trans-Atlantic tunnel project had been postponed indefinitely after the loss of the Grand Banks drilling platform, so the company had just laid off a hundred and twenty-five people from the research and development division.

Since BlueSeas was still fighting the tunnel in federal court, trying to shut it down entirely by litigating it to death, what little money AquaCorp earned from Nautilus was being devoured by lawyers. As a result, the colony wasn't generating revenue fast enough for the stockholders, who had sunk billions into creating an artificial cay three miles off the coast of Cape Hatteras. Some of the major investors were already beginning to talk about jumping ship, or island, whatever.

However, the company was still squeezing marginal profits out of its undersea mining operations. Although most of AquaCorp's marine mines were located on the Continental Shelf, where teleoperated robots and manned mobile platforms dredged the metalliferous ooze six hundred fifty feet below the surface, this was the less lucrative aspect of the company's mining operations. For each ton of nickel, iron, or silicon the company produced from the shelf, about a hundred tons of organic sediment had to be dredged and filtered; this meant that the shallow-ocean operations barely broke even most of the time.

The real money lay much farther down, in the depths of the Atlantic Basin at the bottom of the Continental Slope, fourteen thousand feet below the surface. Down there, in the cold pitch darkness, lay the motherlode: manganese nodules, potato-shaped deposits of manganese veined with trace amounts of copper, nickel, cobalt and various other heavy metals. Unlike the metalliferous ooze, the nodules could be easily scoured from the ocean floor by robotic harvesters teleoperated from Nautilus.

Did I say "easily?" Nothing was easy about deep-sea mining, particularly not at such extreme depths, where the pressure could crush a minisub like an empty beer can. No one ventured down there unless it was absolutely necessary. They say outer space is the most hostile environment known to man, but I'd prefer to be a lunar miner with a slow leak in his hardsuit than an aquanaut whose bathyscaphe has developed a crack in its hull. The astronaut, at least, has a half-decent chance of survival, if he or she reacts quickly enough. An aquanaut in a similar predicament beneath the Continental Slope not only doesn't have a prayer, he or she doesn't even have a chance to utter one before the vehicle implodes.

Together, they reached the conclusion that th
Atlantic Anomaly"—or Gastropoda horribilis, to use the zoo
was indeed a mollusk of enormous size: in other words, a gian

Yet, on that particular day, Jack and I took a bathyscaphe down the slope, if only because we needed to find out what had happened to Porky Pig. Porky was one of the two teleoperated harvesters which prowled the bottom, scooping up nodules and shooting them up the lift pipe to the refinery raft. The day before, Porky had suddenly stopped moving; although its drivers continued to receive telemetry, the enormous machine couldn't be budged from its last known location, and the only thing coming up the pipe was saltwater—clean saltwater, which indicated that its scoops were no longer in contact with the seabed.

We had no idea what could have caused Porky to abruptly cease operations. Seismometers on the shelf hadn't registered any major seaquakes—which were unlikely in this part of the North Atlantic—and Porky's twin, Elmer Fudd, was still gobbling up nodules only a couple of miles away. Jack could have done the job himself, but it had been several months since I had last made a deep-dive, and I wanted a first-hand look at the manganese field AquaCorp was presently mining, to make sure that it wasn't beginning to run dry. When something like that happens, it's always the marine geology division that gets the blame; as the department head, I was the guy wearing the noose.

Anyway, we followed Porky's tube down the slope, Jack in the pilot's chair while I lay on my belly below him behind the observation window, watching as the bathyscaphe floodlights attempted to penetrate the darkness. All I could see was the pale bioluminescence of tiny octopi and gape-jawed angler fish, and even they vanished as we reached depths where only the simplest of lifeforms could survive the intense pressure.

We found Porky just where the VR geeks said it would be. Incredibly, the massive machine was up-ended on one side, its caterpillar treads and troughlike scoops completely clear of the sea floor. The harvester looked as if it had run over a large object and tipped to one side, yet there were no boulders or seamounts in sight which could have done such a thing.

As Jack slowly orbited the harvester, though, I noticed a wide, shallow furrow running through the silt. For a few moments I thought it had been made by Porky itself, until I realized that it was both wider and deeper than the tracks left behind by the machine, and it did not have the serrated edges of the harvester tracks. The furrow came up from behind Porky, and then it went on again, heading into the darkness on a straight line which, when I checked the com-

A Slug is Born

The inspiration for "Jonathan Livingstone Seaslug" came from a letter I received last winter from Arthur C. Clarke. Arthur's correspondence frequently includes miscellany such as newspaper editorials, unusual photos from NASA space probes, printouts of Martian landscapes he has terraformed on his computer—stuff that he believes may be of interest to friends and colleagues.

In this instance, he included a copy of a wry memo he sent to his literary agent, suggesting titles of a number of film projects he'd be interested in developing: "The Infibulator II," "That, Son of It," "Apoplexy Now," "The Godmother" and so forth. Stuck in the middle of the list was "Jonathan Livingstone Seaslug."

Within minutes of reading that memo, I found myself brainstorming the story for "Jonathan Livingstone Seaslug." Dr. Clarke graciously consented to let me borrow the title, and this story is the result.

I later discovered that Arthur had come up with his own scenario for "Jonathan Livingstone Seaslug"; it can be found in his 1977 essay "Writing to Sell," reprinted in *1984: Spring—A Choice of Futures.* Fortunately, the adventures of his slug and mine have little in common.

pass bearing led due west toward the slope.

I asked Jack to follow the trail. Just as intrigued as I, he readily complied, keeping a low altitude above the ocean bed as he piloted the bathyscaphe as if he were following a runway—which, indeed, the furrow vaguely resembled under the dim, greenish glow of the floodlights.

We had followed the furrow for seven and a half miles, and Jack had just warned me that we were getting close to the slope, when the forward sonar began to ping. Jack throttled back the props; when it

"Hughes-Sheldon Mid-logical name they concocted—sea slug.

became apparent that something very large was just in front of us, he raised altitude until the ocean floor disappeared. Perhaps we had found a long-lost World War II U-boat, or even a small freighter which had gone down during a storm in the last few decades. In any case, he didn't want to risk ramming it, yet just as we were beginning to wonder why we hadn't spotted the debris field customary of deep-ocean wrecks, Jack hauled back hard on the yoke.

I slid backward on my stomach as the bathyscaphe nosed upward. I was still yelling obscenities when Jack leveled off again. When I looked up at him, he was hastily checking the atmosphere gauges; he later told me that he thought he was suffering nitrogen narcosis.

By then I had scrambled back to the windows. For a moment, I saw nothing. Then the floodlights caught and held an immense hump of gray, freckled with dull orange spots, smooth and gently curved like a humongous blob of flesh which had been plopped down in front of us, featureless except for long, slender rills of skin which ran in parallel rows along the top of the hump. It seemed motionless at first, yet despite the bathyscaphe's own forward momentum, it was soon apparent that this object was ponderously moving of its own accord.

Still unaware of what I was seeing, I triggered the still camera as Jack slowly maneuvered the bathyscaphe around the enormous form. Ten…twenty…thirty…forty…forty-seven feet passed as we followed the immense thing from its tapering tail, across its vast bloated back, down to the scimitar-shaped head where a pair of long, horn-like antennae sprouted like a pair of slender prongs.

It was the size of a two-story house, and it was definitely a living organism.

"Oh, momma," Jack said when he completed our first pass over the abomination. "It's a goddamn slug."

NOBODY WOULD HAVE BELIEVED US IF WE HADN'T PRODUCED PICTURES—and even after Jack and I showed the disk to about a dozen people, most of them still refused to buy our story. Neither of us had reputations as practical jokers, though, and once the bio lab's photo analysis department returned a verdict that the pictures had definitely not been faked, the senior marine zoologist hauled Jack back to his bathyscaphe almost as soon as he had decompressed from his last dive.

Dr. Chang reemerged from the sub some six hours later, with eyes as large as the slug itself. Although this time the creature had hidden itself by squirting a cloud of ink from glands beneath its fins, Chang had managed to get a few more pictures. He spent his time in the decomp chamber, huddled over a computer terminal, trading data over the 'net with some colleagues at Woods Hole.

Together, they reached the conclusion that the "Hughes-Sheldon Mid-Atlantic Anomaly"—or *Gastropoda horribilis*, to use the zoological name they concocted—was indeed a mollusk of enormous size: in other words, a giant sea slug.

Duh. I could have told them that.

Chang instructed the rest of his division and everyone else who had seen the pictures to keep a lid on the discovery, but they should have known better. Nautilus has a permanent population of just over fifteen hundred people; just as in any small town, gossip travels fast, and the satellite dishes on the arcology's roof aren't there for show. Less than twenty-four hours after Jack and I found the creature, several dozen reporters had already called Nautilus' public relations office, and another handful were stepping off the helipad.

I don't recall which journalist first came up with the name "Jonathan Livingstone Seaslug." Someone with a good memory for obscure twentieth-century pop lit and a bad taste in puns. Once dubbed, though, the Hughes-Sheldon name disappeared without a trace and J.L. Seaslug was born. Just as well; I didn't particularly relish having my name permanently associated with a giant slug.

Not that it mattered. As soon as the first members of the Fourth Estate stormed the concrete beaches of our artificial cay, I was subjected to a ceaseless round of interviews. Although I'm a geologist by trade, Chang didn't want to meet the press, and Jack found reasons to be absent whenever someone wanted a first-hand account of the initial discovery. The press office kept sending the news hacks my way, and I soon found myself in the role as Jonathan's ombudsman.

To be fair, many of the reporters asked reasonably intelligent questions. However, the majority tended to pose queries of the "how did you feel?" variety. After the first several descriptions of surprise and awe, I lapsed into a prefabricated spiel until when someone asked how I felt for the umpteenth time, I replied, "Like I just saw a giant slug" and walked away. After that, the chief press liaison answered all the questions; I told him it was time he started earning his paycheck.

Almost every reporter wanted to go down below to take a look at Jonathan himself; when they were refused, two or three attempted outright bribery. Even if Jack or I had been so inclined to fatten our bank accounts, though, it would have been at the expense of our jobs; Miles Van Der Horst, Nautilus' general manager, declared Jonathan off-limits to all dives except those whose orders he had personally countersigned. In addition, we were careful not to disclose the precise coordinates of where we had found Jonathan. This was just as well since there were quite a few freelance deep-ocean prospectors on the mainland who would have been only too willing to lease their craft to the press.

There's little point in rehashing the ten-day sensation Jonathan caused. After the first few headline stories and breathless TV news features, Jonathan became the perfect timely metaphor for every pundit, talk-show host, and standup comedian on the planet. For a while I collected political cartoons which showed the face of one elected official or another superimposed on Jonathan's body. The T-shirts featuring the beast were a fad which was just as mercifully short-lived … and I'll wipe the deck with the next person who cracks an escargot joke in my presence.

The low point occurred when a pseudo-scientific crank by the name of Peter Goudge made wild claims that Jonathan was the harbinger of an "invasion from inner space." Trotting out that lame old horse, the Bermuda Triangle, Goudge took the public stage to attest that Jonathan was a bioenginered juggernaut sent up from the deepest reaches of the Atlantic by some advanced civilization bent on global conquest. Naturally, he wanted the U.S. Navy to drop nuclear depth-charges on the monster.

He was countered by a group of quasi-religious fanatics called the Church of Harmonic Convergence, who believed that Jonathan was an emissary from an aquatic species hiding out in the Caymen Trench. *This* undersea super-race—which, the Church carefully pointed out, bore no relationship to *that* undersea super-race—had sent a giant sea slug to teach the human race the error of its science-materialist, male-dominant, warmongering ways. They went so far as to charter a yacht out of Cape Hatteras to take them out to the edge of the shelf, where they unwittingly dropped anchor seven miles from where Jonathan had been located. According to reports, they then huddled together on the aft deck for the next two days, where they fasted, got nasty sunburns, and became seasick while they attempted to establish telepathic communion with the slug.

The only bright spot in the whole affair was that a hypertext publisher, knowing a good business opportunity when he saw one, rushed into print John Wyndam's 1952 classic *Up From The Deeps*.

The novel had nothing to do with Jon, but at least a great story was rescued from oblivion; the publisher downloaded more than a million copies in less than a month.

IN THE MIDST OF ALL THE HOOPLA, DR. CHANG AND HIS COHORT QUIETLY continued to study *Gastropoda horribilis*. Safe from the limelight, they sent bathyscaphes down to the Atlantic Basin, where they watched Jonathan from a discrete distance.

stopped from time to time, apparently not only to rest but also to acclimate itself to the pressure differentials. The rest periods would last from a few minutes to several hours, then the slug would continue upward another fifty to a hundred feet before it paused again. The gradual change in thermocline didn't seem to affect it, although we noted that its orange freckles seemed to diminish in number and size.

Jonathan's slow, meticulous journey took two days, during which time all hell was breaking loose on the surface.

After two days of renewed hysteria, though, I wonder myself how a two-inch thick filet of escargot would arguing over fishing rights to Flipper, for chrissakes. This was

At first, they were able to sneak up on Jonathan, until the slug, now wise to the approach of a bathyscaphe, ejected its dense ink fog at the first sound of props. They then kept track of its progress with surface sonar, until someone noticed that the mollusk would remain absolutely motionless during sonar contacts; apparently, like so many other sea creatures, Jon navigated by means of its own internal sonar.

Afraid of confusing Jonathan, Chang ordered an end to sonar spying. Several days later, the next bathyscaphe to visit the slug managed to get close enough to attach an extra-low frequency (ELF) homing device to its skin. In doing so, the research team discovered something new: as soft and blubbery as Jonathan's flesh appeared to be, it was actually as tough as elephant hide. Except for the usual ink-cloud, though, Jonathan barely seemed to notice the bathyscaphe's presence. It simply continued its unswerving westward crawl across the ocean floor.

The homing device in place, Chang's team set out to learn as much about Jonathan as it possibly could...and that was damned little indeed. Where did it come from? Somewhere deep in the Atlantic, but its trail eroded only a few miles after the creature left it behind, leaving no clues to its exact place of origin. How did it breathe? Through sets of gills near its head. What did it eat? Any organic detritus in its path; it avoided manganese nodules, but greedily devoured the scum on the sea floor. What did it excrete? A long trail of slime. Was it male or female? No one could tell for sure. Did it have any natural predators? Except for a few tiny squid clinging to its flanks like remora, none to be seen; it existed in a realm far removed from that of sharks, barracuda, or giant squid, and for all anyone knew, it could be hundreds of years old. Who did it think would win the World Series? The Red Sox, probably, although the Braves' outfield was looking particularly strong this season...."

Yet the two biggest questions—where was it going, and were there any more like it back home—were not answered until Jonathan reached the edge of the Continental Shelf. Those who believed that the creature, once confronted with the mammoth bluffs, would simply turn around and go back the way it came were astonished when Jonathan, without any apparent hesitation, began to climb up the steep cliff.

For one reason or another, Jonathan was heading for the submarine domain of humankind.

WHEN JONATHAN'S ELF BEACON SHOWED THAT IT WAS SCALING THE Continental Shelf, no one believed it was possible. After all, the creature was estimated to weigh in excess of ten tons, perhaps more. It was incredible that it could move in the first place, let alone climb a near-vertical wall. Surely the transmitter itself was malfunctioning—yet when Jack and I took a bathyscaphe down to check on our friend's progress, we saw Jonathan gamely clinging to the rugged slope like a snail within a tropical fish tank, inching its way upward with the same patient, inexorable progress.

Many thought that Jonathan would perish from the decreased pressure, yet as it slowly ascended from the depths, we observed that it

Despite the news blackout, word of Jonathan's ascent soon reached the ears and pens of the news media, which wasted no time in blabbing it to the world. Naturally, the lunatic fringe claimed the latest development as proof of their pet theories: while Peter Goudge stepped up his demands for a full-scale attack upon Atlantis, the Church of Harmonic Convergence staged a press conference, stating that the day of universal peace and truth was at hand and that the slug was the new messiah come forth. Both sides made a few more bucks through calls to their 1-900 numbers; Goudge's latest tract made the online bestseller list, and Church leaders staged mass-meditations across the East Coast, where dozens of believers flocked to achieve "group-mind symbiosis" with a mollusk.

Fanaticism aside, though, there was genuine concern about what might occur if and when Jonathan made it to the top of the slope and entered the Continental Shelf. It was out of the question that it would eventually make its way to dry land—Jon was strictly aquatic, as evidenced by its gills—but according to the position of its radio beacon and the beeline course it had made thus far, it seemed certain that the creature would move straight into AquaCorp's offshore mining area. There was a lot of valuable equipment scattered across the shelf, including the immobile intake ducts of the hydrothermal energy plants that supplied energy to a large portion of the eastern seaboard. We had already seen what Jon could do to a five-ton mining robot, and Porky wasn't much larger than some of the hardware that lay in its path.

That fact wasn't lost on the media. When asked about it by a reporter from the *Times*, though, Miles Van Der Horst made a serious mistake: he claimed that AquaCorp would do whatever was necessary to protect its capital investments, even if that included "warding off" the creature through unspecified means.

He was alluding to conversations he had already had with Nautilus' Barracuda squadron. Established as the colony's first-line defense team against everything from sharks to pirates, the Barracuda subs were equipped with low-yield torpedoes and electrical wands; it had been Van Der Horst's idea to send out the Barracudas if Jonathan got too close to any of the mining operations. The general manager didn't want to harm Jonathan, just deter it from wreaking havoc. In fact, since several commercial fishermen were openly discussing tuna nets to trap the creature—remember the escargot jokes?—Van Der Horst had already told the Barracudas to use force if necessary to prevent Jonathan from winding up as the catch of the day in French restaurants.

However, when BlueSeas read his injudicious remarks, it screamed bloody murder. Hell hath no fury like an environmental activist on a crusade. BlueSeas charged that AquaCorp intended to destroy this unique and valuable species. Within hours, one of their boats was dispatched from Cape Hatteras, its crew bound and determined to stop Jonathan from being molested by evil capitalists. Since Jonathan was still some two thousand feet underwater, the *Rainbow Octopus* was only a minor nuisance, yet the organization's lawyers wasted no time in trying to get a North Carolina federal judge to place an injunction against AquaCorp, preventing any company subs from approach-

ing within a thousand feet of the slug.

Even if the judge hadn't laughed BlueSeas out of his office, the bad publicity they created for AquaCorp was a PR nightmare. Although Van Der Horst publicly recanted by stating that the Barracudas would stay away from Jonathan, the perception was that Nautilus intended to fire torpedoes at the poor, defenseless sea creature if it so much as poked an antenna over the top of the shelf.

Once again, the press office was besieged by reporters … and when

I was beginning to taste. It wasn't like we were a goddamn slug.

the press releases wouldn't work their magic, I was drafted back into being the official spokesman.

After all, I was one of the men who had found Jonathan. I was a scientist. Aren't scientists supposed to know everything? The fact that I was a geologist was lost on everyone; I was the voice of the slug. Reluctantly, I did another round of press conferences and interviews, during which I reiterated the company line: Jonathan would not be harmed, Jonathan would not be killed, Jonathan was a unique creature and AquaCorp would allow it to go unmolested wherever it damned well pleased.

After two days of renewed hysteria, though, I was beginning to wonder myself how a two-inch thick filet of escargot would taste. It wasn't like we were arguing over fishing rights to Flipper, for chrissakes. This was a goddamn slug. Didn't they have more important things to worry about? No one had paid much attention to Nautilus from the time it was built until Jonathan appeared, even though the colony was at the vanguard of human progress. Suddenly a sea monster appears, and everyone goes bananas.

I was beginning to resent the intrusion. Let the beast come up here and die; that was the leading theory, and I was only too willing to accept it. Let it end its natural cycle of life by dying in coastal waters; the fish could gnaw its carcass to the bones, if it had any, and then we could return to business as usual. To hell with it.

But I kept my mouth shut, because I was on company time, and finally the PR counteroffensive seemed to work. The media finally backed off … but just to be on the safe side, AquaCorp assigned me to pilot the only minisub which would be permitted to go near Jonathan once it entered the shelf. The press wanted someone on live camera to narrate Jon's grand entrance, and since I was now Mr. Trustworthy, I was picked for the job.

I was still bitching about it when, twenty hours later, Jonathan reached the edge of the Continental Shelf.

I WAS NOT ALONE IN THE SUB AS I FOLLOWED JONATHAN ACROSS THE shallow sea bed. A few million people were in the vehicle with me, watching through satellite TV linkup, while I piloted the tiny vehicle at a safe distance from the creature.

I don't remember most of what I said; my concentration was wholly focused upon the controls, and I had to be prompted several times to keep up a running narrative. In any event, it happened this way:

Jonathan moved for a mile and a half along the shelf on a due-west course. Most of the mining equipment had been relocated, but it still managed to capsize a hydrothermal plant, which in turn caused a temporary brownout in a large portion of New Jersey. For a while, I wondered if the slug would indeed attempt to beach itself on Cape Hatteras. And then…

Jonathan stopped.

For the next hour and thirty minutes, it remained almost motionless. As I orbited the creature, all that my sub's floodlights could pick out were the slow, labored movement of its gills, an occasional ripple which passed along its flanks, the trembling of its antenna. Curious fish approached, then darted away; at one point, a distant shark pack started to home in, but was quickly scattered by a Barracuda sub which had been covertly dispatched to the area.

Four hundred feet above, the *Rainbow Octopus* held position, its protesters waving banners for passing helicopters to see. On the shore, the Church of Harmonic Convergence sat in a circle, meditating until their brains began to boil. The TV audience channel-surfed between me, Peter Goudge, and a lot of reruns of old sitcoms; through my headset, Dr. Chang asked ceaseless questions that I could seldom answer.

But down there…

Down there, we were at peace, Jonathan and I, isolated from an air-breathing world which seemed to have lost its collective mind. For a few precious minutes, I switched off the comlink, and then it was just the two of us. Through the hydrophones, I thought, for a fleeting moment, I could hear it singing, like the whale songs sailors sometimes hear on the open sea.

But of course, I could be wrong. Whales sing; sea slugs do not….

In those few minutes, I forgot my resentment and remembered the wonder I had experienced the first time I had seen the creature. Yes, it was a mammoth slug—stupid, brainless, primitive, repulsive, all that and more—yet it was an alien form of life, far older than I, awesome not only in its dimensions but also the unfathomable instincts which had driven it to this place, against all odds. It was less of an abomination than a force of nature, and for better or worse, I had become its consort.

In its own way—dare I say it?—it was beautiful.

And then, abruptly, a dense cloud of ink ejected from Jonathan's dorsal area, and the creature seemed to thrash about, stirring up silt that, together with the dark purple ink, obscured my vision. I hovered nearby, reporting everything I could see until the currents swept the ink away and the sand settled, and when everything was calm once more, all our questions were finally answered.

JONATHAN IS GONE NOW. IT—OR RATHER, SHE—CRAWLED BACK DOWN the Continental Slope to the trackless depths from which she came. We have no way of knowing where she came from, since the ELF radio beacon finally failed, crushed by the extreme pressure of the nigh-bottomless gulf of the Atlantic Basin.

All that remains is the legacy she left behind: eight eggs, each the size of a small car, smooth and spherical, and dark blue like a summer sky she never saw. They lay half-buried in a shallow trench, warmed by the subtropical currents which she instinctively sought out during her long pregnancy. Perhaps only once every century or two, she makes the arduous climb up the vast slope, searching for the single place where an intuitive compass tells her they will be safe. It matters little if her nest is now surrounded by aliens and weird machines; here the eggs will remain untouched until the time comes.

And so it will be. I'm now the guardian of Jonathan's eggs. The company has relieved me of all other duties; the geoscience division continues to operate in my absence. Besides, AquaCorp is making a mint out of the publicity. BlueSeas has finally dropped its lawsuits, and I'm told that the TV-movie rights to my story fetched a few million bucks. Jack Hughes quit the company to become the technical adviser. I got a postcard from him last week, in fact; he's doing pretty well for himself, out in Los Angeles. I think his book will be a bestseller.

The company set up a small habitat on the ocean floor, just a few hundred feet from the nest. All the mining equipment has been cleared away from the area, and even the nearby hydrothermal plant has been permanently shut down. It's very quiet in this part of the ocean. Chang and a few other scientists come down for visits every once in a while, but otherwise I'm the only permanent resident. It's not that bad. I've got some books to read, I watch a lot of TV, and I have all the seafood I can eat.

We're down here alone, the eggs and I.

It's been ten months now, and they still haven't hatched. On the other hand, no one knows what their gestation time could be. In the meantime, I've learned to be a patient man.

When they're hatched, will eight giant slugs consider me to be their father? □

The end of civilization as we know it had arrived, and it was up to Professor Malone to figure out why.

THINGS FALL APART

BY DANIEL HOOD

Illustration by Gary Yealdhall

PROFESSOR MALONE WAS AT HOME, WATCHING A TV PROGRAM called *Changing Your Life for the Better*, when things started falling apart.

Changing Your Life for the Better's whole purpose, as the suitably earnest-looking host announced at the beginning of the broadcast, was to showcase new and interesting inventions. There were, the professor knew, a large number of programs just like it, on many of the 3,212 stations he received on his flatscreen (only 718 of which he could understand, because they were in English, and even fewer of which he could claim to have actually watched).

It was exactly 8:13:00 when things started falling apart. The professor knew this because, just after the flatscreen mounted in the wall of his living unit went blank, the digital clock below the screen blinked 8:13:00 at him. And then it died too.

The lights, however, remained on.

The professor had been watching *Changing Your Life for the Better* not out of interest in the program—he found it deeply depressing in a democratic kind of way—but because his neighbor was on it that evening. His neighbor, in fact, was the last thing he saw before the screen went out.

Changing Your Life for the Better's claim to originality in the very-crowded field of new-product-flogging was that it had "ordinary people" on the show; Ronald Gianini (the professor's neighbor) was as ordinary as they came: a little fat, a little stupid, with just a touch, as the professor liked to say, "of the Luddite and the Philistine."

It should not be presumed that the professor did not like his neighbor. They were almost the same age—very old—and for Professor Malone, the terms "Luddite" and "Philistine" were almost endearments. And he was, after all, taking time out from grading his term-end papers to watch Gianini be introduced to a machine which could turn human fecal matter into edible, nourishing food.

"You mean crap?" Gianini said to the host of the program viewed live by approximately 200 million people (and requested on pay-per-view, on average, by a further 100 million each week).

"Yes," the host beamed, "crap! This machine, thanks to the wonders of modern science, can turn human waste into perfectly delicious meals!"

The professor, in the moment before his neighbor's next comment, thought about how standards had fallen since the FCC was privatized.

Then Gianini spoke, and right after that, at 8:13:00, things started falling apart.

What he said, with a look of supreme skepticism, was: "I don't effing believe it."

THE PROFESSOR DID NOT KNOW, OF course, that things were falling apart. His screen went blank, but the lights stayed on. He assumed, quite naturally, that there had been a power failure at the studio.

"Thank God for home solar power," he said, and then decided to go to bed. Watching *Changing Your Life for the Better* had put him completely out of the mood to finish grading his term-end papers, so he turned off the lights and went to bed.

If he had tried to finish grading his papers, he would have noticed that his computer did not work. This was part of things falling apart.

It has since been estimated that over 200,000 people died within ten minutes of 8:13:00 that night. These included:

- People in airplanes that crashed because the sophisticated electronics and computer gear that guided them suddenly failed;
- Patients in hospitals whose continued survival was dependent on advanced machinery or various nanotechnologies;
- All the inhabitants of the recently established Moon Base; and
- The producer of *Changing Your Life for the Better*, who was thinking how much Gianini's use of the still-prohibited f-word was going to cost him in fines and had a heart attack as a result.

The professor, as we have said, did not know this. He was sleeping.

HE STILL DID NOT KNOW ANYTHING WAS WRONG THE NEXT MORNING, but he began to have an inkling. First of all, none of the appliances in his kitchen worked. The lights came on when he called for them, but the coffee maker did not pour him a cup, and the Toasticator did not condense his ordinary breakfast. This was annoying but not necessarily unusual.

His car did not work either. The gullwing door did not whoosh open when he whistled "Little Red Corvette" at it (a private joke from his youth, which the car-alarm installer had not understood), nor did it respond to his thumbprint.

These two things did not make him worry, however. What made him worry was that Gianini was not home. At that hour, his neighbor should have been sitting on his front porch, enjoying a custom-designed virtual reality game that allowed him to blast away at an army of giant rats invading his lawn. (It reminded him, he said, of the days of his youth, when he had shot rats in his father's junkyard.)

Gianini's absence sent a strange, light chill down the professor's spine. Then, feeling rather silly, he turned to walk the few blocks to the campus of the university at which he taught.

HINDSIGHT, OF COURSE, CAN BE CONFUSING. RECONSTRUCTING POSsible pasts is a fairly silly business, but it is interesting to note that a United Nations white paper published after things were put back together again suggested that, if things hadn't fallen apart, Professor Malone would have been dead that morning, burned to a cinder in a nuclear holocaust.

The thinking ran like this: in the hours after 8:13:00, in a number of countries, a surprisingly large number of missile crews, believing that the power outages and computer failures were the result of an electromagnetic pulse caused by a nuclear attack, attempted to respond by launching nuclear weapons. A breakdown of these attempts looks like this:

Country	No. of Missiles	No. of Attempted Launches
U.S.	23,123	38
Greater Russia	17,345	45
China	3,612	237
European Union	3,607	2
Pakistan	10	1
India	13	2
Iran	3	0
Israel/Palestine	6	0
North Korea	37	37*

**One of North Korea's bombs was actually launched, but only after things had been put together again—the launch button, apparently, was still depressed. "Thankfully," the UN white paper notes, "it only destroyed Pyongyang."*

WHAT THE PAPER DOES NOT DEAL WITH, OF COURSE, IS THE FACT THAT if things hadn't started falling apart, no one would have tried to launch the missiles, so that things falling apart couldn't have prevented the launches. Hindsight, as mentioned above, can be confusing.

What is certain, however, is that things continued to fall apart that morning. In addition to nuclear missiles, thousands of other things weren't working: municipal power supplies (as distinct from home solar power), heavy-water cars, mag-lev trains, computers, food condensers, TVs, etc., etc.

SO, WHEN PROFESSOR MALONE REACHED THE ADMIRABLY IVIED grounds of the university at which he taught, he discovered the campus in an uproar. Panicky groups of students were rushing here and there, demanding explanations. There was even a protest group outside the Sciences Complex.

The professor ignored them. His office was in the Philosophy Annex, altogether a shabbier building than the Sciences Complex, but with its own coffee maker which, he fervently hoped as he shuffled across the embattled commons, was still working.

It was not. Neither was the refrigerator in the antiquated staff kitchen, but he found a bottle of lukewarm water and made do. Sipping at the attached straw, he made his way to his office.

The professor, as everyone now knows, taught Logic. And so, when he sat down in his office, the first thing he did was to make a list. This list, written with an antique Bic pen on a real sheet of paper taken from a stack thick with dust near the staff printer (which had not been used in over thirty years), is now on view at the Smithsonian Institution. The first part reads like this:

Things That Don't Work

- Car
- TV
- Computers
- Food Condenser
- Coffee maker (!!!!!)
- Gianini

The last, of course, is not strictly logical. Gianini did not work, being retired, but that was not what the professor was thinking of; he was wondering if his neighbor's absence from his accustomed rat-shooting post meant that he had been stuck in the large city

nearby where *Changing Your Life for the Better* was taped.

He was thinking this when one of his few academic friends, a professor of the History of Science, appeared at the door of his office.

"Hello, John," he said. "Big problems."

"I should say so," the professor said. "Nothing works. Are you modern-day Frankensteins trying to figure out what's wrong with your monsters?"

"They're trying," the history professor said, vaguely gesturing in the direction of the Sciences Complex and refraining from explaining (for the hundredth time) that he was not connected with that gleaming edifice, but rather with the smaller and much-less-impressive History Annex.

"Well, I should hope so," the professor said, but without any real anger. "You have addicted us to your machines and your technologies, and now they have failed us, utterly and, perhaps, irrevocably."

The professor of the History of Science departed, shaking his head at the professor's tendency toward rhetorical flourishes and leaving him to brood over his list.

DURING THE COURSE OF THAT LONG day, a number of other things fell apart. Synthetic clothing went fairly quickly, disintegrating between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Literally billions were left naked, and insult was added to injury when many were locked out because their door locks refused to recognize them.

Gunpowder also failed, much to the relief of the hundreds of thousands of people rioting in capitals around the world. Unluckily for them, however, water cannon and police batons did not, and the world's leaders were left in peace to fail to deal with the crisis.

In addition, relatively unsophisticated scientific equipment failed—microscopes, centrifuges, geiger counters, etc—greatly retarding the ability of scientists to fail to deal with the crisis.

The professor noticed this when he wandered over to the Sciences Complex around 3 p.m., having spent several hours pondering the logical consequences of this technological collapse, as well as a fruitless hour searching for a functioning lunch dispenser. He settled for a somewhat-soft apple from the staff refrigerator and, munching this, sidled into one of the rear entrances of the Complex and up to the giant Chemistry laboratory.

Hundreds of dedicated chemists were there looking for the answer to why things had fallen apart and were continuing to fall apart. When the professor politely inquired if they had made any progress, they frowned as a unit and expressed their determination, to a man, to find an answer.

Which the professor took to mean they had not made any progress.

He received much the same answer at the Physics laboratory, the Nanotechnology department, the Astronomy section and the Geology office. The resident botanist told him that the disaster did not seem, thus far, to have affected flowers.

Dissatisfied, but not really very disappointed, the professor walked home in the warm dusk, thankful that the crisis had not struck during winter. He has since confessed that he himself was something of a Luddite and a Philistine, and the lack of answers in the Science Complex did not surprise him.

The questions he posed himself that evening were three:

1) What had gone wrong?

2) How could he help?

3) Where was Gianini?

"There are some questions," he was later quoted as saying, "which simply cannot be considered for very long. The collapse of material civilization as we know it is one of them—particularly when it's happening at the time."

The fact of the matter is that he did not consider these questions for very long. While authorities around the world were trying to deal with acute food shortages—hydroponics facilities around the world had failed sometime around 6 p.m., the plants simply withering away or dissolving into inedible muck—without benefit of computer, telephone or even radio contact, the professor started reading the *TV Guide*.

The reason is simple: there was nothing else to read. The "Paperless Revolution," which had occurred four decades earlier at the turn of the century, had not only saved countless trees, it had made the avid reader dependent on computers for books, magazines, newspapers, etc. This would not ordinarily have been a problem, but then, when things fall apart, things that would not ordinarily *be* problems suddenly *become* problems.

The *TV Guide* (500 pages thick) was one of the few things the professor's neighbor ever read, and he printed it out daily. The professor enjoyed this small eccentricity of Gianini's, considering it a small rebellion against the modern era. (In fact, Gianini simply could not keep up with the rapid flicker of times and programs on the Channel Channel.) Malone, though, found it particularly ironic, since the giant size of TV listings after the cable explosion around the turn of the century had been one of the leading factors in the "Paperless Revolution."

In any case, Gianini had brought it to the professor the day before, to remind him of the fact that he was going to appear on *Changing Your Life for the Better*.

It was this listing that the Professor now looked at, (8:00:00 Eastern U.S. S.T.: Ch. 63A: *Changing Your Life for the Better*: Average Guest Ronald Gianini) circled in red ink and underlined. There were over 200 listings for U.S. channels at 8 p.m., and roughly another 3,000 for international channels. Idly, the professor ran his finger down the first column on the first page of the 45 pages that listed programs beginning between 7:30:00 and 8:30:00 U.S. Eastern Standard Time.

Five entries down his finger paused, and he cocked his white-haired head.

"Hmm," he said to himself, and let his finger drop a little further down the column.

"Aha," he murmured.

Being a professor of Logic who liked to practice what he preached, he began copying out a list of all the programs at that time that fit the theory he was rapidly developing. However, in shifting the *TV Guide* to a more comfortable position on his lap, he chanced to drop it on his foot. His attention drawn by pain to its thickness, he decided instead to simply circle those entries relevant to his theory, and was pleased to note, after almost an hour of poring over the minute print, that there were over a hundred of them. (The actual *TV Guide* the professor used is also now on display at the Smithsonian.)

After compiling this list, a quick glance at the ratings section (twenty pages alone, with breakdowns by region and language) further strengthened his hypothesis.

Satisfied with his night's work, the professor, in his own words, "yawned hugely" and went to bed.

RETIRING AT A RELATIVELY EARLY HOUR, THE PROFESSOR DID NOT notice that things were continuing to fall apart. Water ceased flowing higher than the second floor of all buildings. Elevators around the world either froze in position or dropped to the bottom of their shafts, their cables snapped. Home solar power finally gave out in the hours before dawn, although the previous days had been unusually bright and sunny. Cigarette lighters and matches stopped producing flames. Stainless steel knives started rusting.

The professor did notice, when he woke up, that the power was out in his house, but he only shrugged when the light didn't go on in the bathroom. If his theory was correct, it was to be expected.

There was only one thing more he wanted to check before acting on his suspicion, but he was at a loss as to how to do so. He wanted to speak with his neighbor, but since Gianini had been in the city when

things started falling apart, he did not think he would be able to return.

To his surprise, however, as he was leaning over the (non-functioning) sink, he heard a pounding at his front door and the voice of his neighbor, shouting: "Hey! Doc! You there? I need your help! This damn VR thing won't work!"

Happy at this unexpected stroke of luck, the professor hurried downstairs and let Gianini in.

"Don't call me 'Doc,' Ronald. I'm not a doctor. And of course it doesn't work. Nothing does—or haven't you noticed?"

"Yeah," Gianini said, scratching his head, "I noticed that. Not a damn thing does work. But what can you expect, huh?"

"Not much," the professor said with a smile. "Tell me, Ronald, how did you get back from the city?"

"Now that was a bitch!" his neighbor said, entirely forgetting his useless VR equipment. "After the crap hit the fan at the studio, I tried to get a train back here, but none of the damn things were running! And neither were any of the heavy-water cars. But I know a guy—an old friend of the family—who collects antique cars, gasburners. He's got a special license for them, and he let me borrow one to drive back here. I tell you, it was just like being a kid again!"

"What took you so long?"

"Oh," Gianini said, his face falling, "the damn thing broke down three or four times between the city and here. Finally gave out about ten miles from here, and I had to spend most of the night walking back here."

"I see. And tell me, what were your feelings at 8:13:00 two nights ago, when you said that you did not believe in the powers claimed for the 'Ultimate Recycler'?"

"Huh?"

"Let me ask it a different way. When you said, 'I don't effing believe it,' were you talking about just the recycler, or about many other things as well?"

"Doc, are you feeling all right?"

"Were you, perhaps, making a comment on the whole course of scientific discovery in this century?" The professor, always easy prey to his own rhetoric, went on: "An anguished cry from the most ordinary of 'Ordinary Guests,' a protest at this ridiculous proposition of turning excrement into edibles? Perhaps giving vent to a feeling of alienation, which oft was felt, but ne'er so well expressed as when you said, and I quote, 'I don't effing believe it.' Was that it, Ronald?"

"Let me feel your forehead, Doc. Are you taking your pills?"

"My pills, Ronald, will not work this morning. But I thank you—as millions will have cause to thank you."

With that, the professor gathered up the *TV Guide* and several sheets of paper and started off for the university campus.

MENTION SHOULD BE MADE OF the immense scientific efforts made to understand the fact that things were falling apart. When the computers went, scientists of all disciplines simply switched to simpler machines; when these too failed, they turned to simple experimentation and dissection, pulling apart useless machines, investigating processes and technologies which should have worked.

When solar power failed, they continued their investigations by candlelight; when matches and lighters failed, they took their work outside. No one can doubt their industriousness and perseverance—only their effectiveness.

The researchers and teachers at the professor's university were much like their comrades around the world: determined to figure out what was going wrong. They too had followed the course through ever simpler machines, though they had been forced out of the massive Sciences Complex when solar power failed, because the ventilation systems no longer provided air to its deep recesses.

So the professor found many of them working on the commons, protected by a deputation of riot police from the tender mercies of an angry mob of student protesters. They were haggard and exhausted (the scientists, not the students), but their determination was undiminished.

The professor put an end to all this. He recognized the dean of the science faculty, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist (known to him only from glossy pictures in university propaganda), and approached him with the *TV Guide* and his lists.

"Dean," the professor said, "I believe I have the answer."

"Who are you? Go away—what? Hold on! The answer? Who are you? You're Johnson, aren't you? From the Urology Department?"

An aide mentioned the professor's name and his speciality.

"Logic, huh? Well, look, Malone, we've got serious troubles here. Don't bother us."

"I have the answer," the professor repeated, unfazed. "I have done some research, and I have the answer."

It was the word 'research' that caught the dean's attention.

"Oh, all right, what is it?"

Clearing his throat, the professor began his explanation.

"At exactly 8:13:00, the vast majority of the world was watching a particular type of television program. Did you know that, Dean?"

"No," the dean said, with barely concealed impatience, "I did not know that. I don't watch TV."

"Neither do I—but a look at the *TV Guide* is instructive. At 8:13:00, as I said, when things began to fall apart, the vast majority of the world was watching a particular type of program which attempts to foist new inventions off on a gullible populace. You are perhaps familiar with *Changing Your Life for the Better*?"

"Sure. I had something on it a month or two ago."

"Of course you did. It is a very popular program, according to the ratings listings in the back of the *TV Guide*. Something like 200 million Americans watch it every week. At 8:13:00, it was introducing a somewhat far-fetched invention."

"The Ultimate Recycler," interjected a nearby chemist. "Damn fine machine."

"Of course," the Professor said politely, "but nonetheless somewhat incredible. At the same time—the exact same time!—something like 1.2 billion Chinese, which is one in three if my knowledge of demographics is up-to-date, were watching a program entitled *We Did It First*, which similarly showcases new inventions. According to the *TV Guide*, the invention that night was supposed to synthesize, from water and common flour, the alleged rejuvenative and aphrodisiacal benefits of tiger's penis soup, ground rhinoceros horn and jellied spotted owls' nests.

"A German program at the same hour was to introduce 564 million European viewers to a machine that allows workers to double their vacation time from its current three months each year to six months.

"A South African program was to show 800 million Africans from Capetown to Cairo how a complex chemical process could reduce the lamentable tendency toward tribal warfare.

"And a Venezuelan program intended to show over a billion Latins that advances in aeronautics would soon give their soccer teams an unbeatable advantage in the World Cup.

"There were over two dozen other programs airing at the same time showing the incalculable benefits soon to be bestowed by science on mankind. I have them all marked here."

He dropped the heavy *TV Guide* with a thump onto a card table, which had been set up nearby to accommodate a (useless) electron microscope.

"There's a pattern there," the dean admitted.

"There is indeed," the professor said, a triumphant gleam appearing in his eye. "And it is this: just as things began to fall apart, a very significant portion of mankind was being told that most of its major

Continued on page 79

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Coming out of cryosuspension, Jason Westerland learned that millions of miles from Earth, life's cold equations were still in effect.

LET SLEEP NOT DIVIDE US

BY PETE D. MANISON

Illustration by Broeck Steadman

WHY DOES IT HAVE to hurt so much?" I whispered, looking out at the cold stars of Andromeda and Cassiopeia, not wanting, just at that moment, to look into her eyes. The tears barely hung in my own eyes as it was. I knew the sight of her sad, smiling face would destroy me.

"Jason...don't."

I felt her hand on my shoulder. The touch communicated enough so that I knew that Aesha, too, was feeling this mixture of sadness and longing and regret. She didn't speak again. Perhaps words, just then, would have been too much.

Why? Why do we form attachments when we know our time together must come so soon to an end? Is it worth it—the joy for the pain, the brief happiness for the longer-lasting ache of what was, of what might have been?

If only we'd known in the beginning.

"This is Waking Cycle 338," the sleepship's cybermind had announced as the ten of us sat awkwardly in the transition chamber. Our skin was pale, and we were thinner than we'd been at Sol departure, but the cryotoxins had been flushed from our bodies, our metabolic rates had stabilized, and our nutrient balances were well on the way to some sort of normalcy.

"Please take this time to acquaint yourselves with your fellow passengers," the emotionless voice of the cybermind continued. "Your Waking Cycle duration is seven days, at which time you

will be returned to your appropriate modules and a state of suspension. Please obey all posted restrictions. I will be available if you have any questions. Enjoy your Waking Cycle."

Silence.

It's always been hard for me, meeting strangers. We sat for a minute or two, stiff, mute, making only brief eye contact. Six of the group were men; four were women. My eyes were drawn to one of the women in particular, a dark, brown-eyed brunette with eyes that flicked with quick intelligence and a face not quite beautiful but somehow all the more appealing for that. Her eyes met mine for an instant. I looked away. If meeting strangers is hard for me, meeting an attractive woman is torture. Perhaps that was why I had left Earth in search of a new life on Midway. It was certainly why, at thirty-three, I remained unattached.

"Enough of this awkwardness," said one of the men, a tall, bearded Asian seated opposite me and far to the right. "Shall we introduce ourselves? I am Chenkang Chen from Module 3, destination New Europa. I go to meet my family, already in transit from Salvation City." The words, spoken with gentle difficulty through his accent, were accompanied by a warm if tentative smile.

"George Fuller," said the man opposite me. "Module 1. I saved for ten years to get off Earth. If I'd known cryo was gonna leave me feeling like this, I'd've settled for the skydomes and the stench. What the hell, I'm here now. God, I'd murder for a cup of coffee."

Tense laughter rippled through the group. George was a plump man, relaxed, likable. By his accent, I judged him to be from somewhere in the Southern United States.

And so it went. Natalia from the Ukraine, spending the family inheritance to seek a new life on Nova Borealis. Kristine from nowhere, leaving a stopover on Earth, one of the super-rich Traveler elite, already over a thousand years old still-time, but only forty subjective. And Patrick and Armand and Dusty and Hassan, each with a story, a reason for choosing a sleepship, with the inherent divorce from humanity that near-c travel entailed. They were a good representation of the ten thousand Sleepers, awakened when their biocycles required it to prevent cell damage. Since individual biocycles varied greatly, no two groups of Wakers ever contained the same people or even the same number of Wakers.

"Aesha Devora," the dark-eyed lady said, her voice liquid but crisp, like her eyes. "My father passed away recently, and I'm going to Nocturnia because…." She trailed off, eyes downcast, but then she mustered a frown and looked up again. "I couldn't stay on Earth, not when I was alone there, when I had no one to…." This time she just shook her head and lifted one hand to indicate she could say no more.

The other three introduced themselves, and I waited until last. As always, I felt reluctant to expose myself to others until the last possible minute.

"Jason," I said, conscious of the sound of my own voice, "Jason Westerland. It sounds like you've all led more interesting lives than mine. I'm just tired of the same old rut. I was getting nowhere on Earth, so I sold everything I owned and…." I glanced up. They were all looking at me, but it was Aesha and those brown eyes that haunted me most. My mind went blank.

"Where you headed?" asked George.

I swallowed. "Midway, same as you. Don't ask me why. If I'd had the money to go farther, I would have." I looked at George as I spoke, but out of the corner of my eye I was sure I saw Aesha watching me. My internal wall had clamped down, though, and by the time I looked her way, she was already engaged in conversation with one of the other women.

"Transition phase complete," the cybermind announced a few minutes later. As much as my heart longed to speak to Aesha, I felt immense relief when we moved out of the transition chamber and into the sleepship's active zone.

THE FIRST DAY AND NIGHT OF A WAKING CYCLE ARE ALWAYS A STRAIN for me. The mind has awakened only partially, and the body, it often seems, not at all. We'd been in space for seven years subjective, and since my biocycle was twenty-eight months, I'd already been awakened twice before. In the orientation phase, they'd told me I was lucky, that some people had cycles of as little as six months. But I've never been able to count my blessings.

So I brooded those first two days, spoke little at meals, and tried to keep to myself as much as possible. Most of us were from different modules, each of which would detach from the sleepship near a different destination, and it seemed pointless to make friends among these people when it was a given that after the Waking Cycle had ended, we would never see each other again.

Besides, I hate making friends. Especially….

"Jason, hi."

I looked up from the book I'd been reading. "Oh, uh, hi." I smiled over the pounding of my heart, but I kept the book open and let the smile submerge itself quickly. Don't. Just don't. There's no future in it, and you'll do yourself harm.

"Am I disturbing you?"

Aesha's voice was wonderful, a sound that fit so neatly into a receptor in my soul that it seemed I had been meant for nothing but the hearing of it. I swallowed, ears ringing. I was terrified.

"Well," I stammered, "actually, I was…." I raised the book an inch or two, and her eyes flicked to it briefly, then back to my face. She had a trace of Asian ancestry, I saw now: it showed in her almond-shaped eyes when she looked at me askance, skeptical.

"The rest of us are getting together for a little celebration," she said. "We were hoping you'd join us."

My heart ached to say yes. These were good people. In one day, the initial awkwardness had melted, and I'd seen a rare comradery emerge. It wasn't only that we alone were awake out of all the sleepship's thousands of passengers. It wasn't only that we hung in space, midway between stars, isolated and alone in the cold abyss. A rare chemistry had arisen here, something I'd learned to recognize by the fear it engendered in me.

Friendship.

"No, I…uh…I mean, thanks for asking, but I…." I looked down to avoid her puzzled little frown and her quick, probing eyes. I could feel her gaze on me, though. It's funny how you can.

"You're sure? We'd all enjoy it more with you there."

Yes, my heart said. *Go with them. With her. Belong.*

"No, really, I'm tired. I was just going to finish this chapter and go

IT WASN'T ONLY THAT WE ALONE WERE AWAKE OUT OF ALL the sleepship's thousands of passengers. It wasn't only that we hung in space, midway between stars, isolated and alone in the cold abyss. A rare chemistry had arisen here, something I'd learned to recognize by the fear it engendered in me.

to sleep. But thanks for asking."

"Aesha," she said, and this time I couldn't dodge her frown or the way it somehow sharpened those features that made her face so fascinating to me. "My name's Aesha."

I nodded. "Sure," I said. "And thanks. I hope you have a good time."

I pretended to read my book, and when I looked up again, she was gone. It completely surprised me, the ache I suddenly felt in my chest.

I RAN. THAT WAS MY USUAL RESPONSE TO "THE FEELING," AND IT inevitably worked. Only this time I was aboard a spaceship—a vast, labyrinthine spaceship, yes, but nonetheless a finite place. There were problems. I couldn't dodge the others at mealtime, since the cybermind dispensed food at only certain hours and in only one location. And in my roamings I inevitably bumped into others.

"There he is," said George. I'd been wandering the perimeter corridors, where pipes lined the walls, their reactive fluids ready to gush forth at the first hull breach and fill the space as they mixed and expanded and hardened, preventing pressure loss deeper in the ship. George and Kristine had come around the bend so suddenly that I'd had no time to avoid them.

"Kristine was just telling me about her travels," George said, his Southern accent particularly obvious in the echoic passageway. "Do you know she's seen twenty-six planets? I think that's a record even for a Traveler."

I glanced at her, nodded. Kristine was an attractive woman, and the mysterious aura that surrounds Travelers was there in full measure, but I felt none of the fear with her or George, just an itching urge to be alone.

"That's interesting," I said.

They looked at each other. Already, I could tell, these two had hit it off. The signs were all there: the instant communication through eye contact; the physical closeness they maintained; the intangible something else that marks a couple. I was fascinated by the match. He was a simple man, direct and open and completely devoid of subtlety. She was complex and hidden, an immortal in her own way, a cheater of time and a Traveler among the stars.

Yet, somehow, it worked.

"See you at breakfast," George said as they continued along. I just grunted.

And saw them at breakfast.

"You pig! It's always the same with you—eat, eat, eat."

With a smile.

"Hey, a body has needs."

"Especially one as large as yours." Chenkang to George.

"Revel in your pleasures," said Kristine. "They are your revenge against a finite existence."

"Aesha says she'll be down in a minute," Dusty said, bounding through the door in sweat pants and a T-shirt. "Hi, Jason. How you holding up?"

I smiled at Dusty's amiability, smiled and meant it, meant it before I could check myself. I remembered his reserved introduction in the transition chamber. That person no longer existed.

"Come jogging with me? You know how important exercise is during a Waking Cycle. Besides, I've found some nifty spots on this old tub." He was looking at me hopefully.

"Thanks," I said, swallowing a mouthful of half-chewed muffin. "But I was right in the middle of something, and I just came down for a quick bite."

And Aesha's coming....

"Well, if you...."

I was through the door already and headed back for my quarters. The atmosphere in there was too sweet, too appealing, too tempting.

Distance.

I took his advice and threw myself into exercise. In the weight room I could work out tension, and I've found that focusing on self-centered activities helps me strengthen the wall I need to protect myself from others.

But Aesha found me there.

"Jason, please."

I had already made a move for the exit, but she'd gotten there too quickly. I stood across the room from her, my chest heaving and my face covered in sweat, and I turned, feeling like a doomed jungle creature. I wondered if a cat's prey would feel the same mixture of terror and anticipation.

"Hello, Aesha," I managed. She had to smile, damn it, and the smile had to be so liquid and pure.

"I've been wanting to talk to you," she said, moving slowly across the gym floor toward me. The closer she got, the more the terror outweighed the anticipation. "But I couldn't find you anywhere. It's almost like you're hiding from me."

I hung my head. Such bewilderment in her voice. And then she was *right there*, and she was reaching out, and she was touching my forearm.

"Can we talk about it?" she asked softly. "Because I...."

I looked up from the floor, and her eyes devoured my heart. I knew then that I had lost, or that I had won, or that maybe I'd somehow done both at the same time.

"Aesha, I'm not...I mean, this can't...." I shook my head. This was why I'd run away from Earth. I needed clarity. I craved detachment. I didn't know how to love anymore, if that was what this was, and who was I kidding? Sometimes the more you hold something in, the more powerful it becomes.

"So you feel it too," she whispered. Her face was so close to mine I could feel her warm breath on my eyes.

"Aesha, this can't be. You know that. I'm going to Midway. You're going to Nocturnia. It just won't work. We can't—"

She kissed me.

Dammit.

And I knew. It could never be like this, except in fairy tales or those stories parents tell their children. Love takes time, right? It grows, it matures, it develops over months or years as two people gradually learn each other in body and mind and soul.

Wrong. Or right, maybe, with some kinds of love. But then there's the other thing, the instant recognition of two spirits that have been linked from the very start, that just haven't been in one place at the same time until now. When that kind of love hits, who has a defense against it? What defenses can stand against an enemy that conquers you from within?

The next two days were heaven. We roamed the ship together, hand in hand, exploring its nooks and crannies and all its hidden surprises. Aesha was delightful. The pain in her frowning face as she spoke of her love for her father and the devastation of his death, that pain only framed the beauty that lived within her. And when we were together, we ceased to be individuals and became one, and for the first time in my life, I knew I had been incomplete.

So, of course, I had to run away. It wasn't a choice, no, and it wasn't what my heart longed for, but she'd drawn me into the circle, and as I came to know George and Kristine and Chenkang and the others, I saw the joy in their eyes that I had joined their little family, and behind the joy I saw the dark specter of time lurking, like the universe's hit man, primed to strike the fatal blow. I might maintain contact with George, once we reached Midway, but the others, every one of them, would be lost to me forever the moment we entered suspension. Our Waking Cycles would never again coincide. And then, one by one, our modules would depart. Time would speed up or slow down, and gulfs wider than space would stretch out between us.

Between...all of us.

"Aesha," I moaned, that fifth night, alone in my hiding place near the cargo modules. "Aesha, Aesha, Aesha." They say men don't cry. They know nothing.

It was Chenkang, of all people, who found me.

"Ah, my friend," he said, cornering me, his hands clasped behind his back, his voice formal and his words carefully enunciated. "I thought I would find you here. The cybermind, it detected movement. I thought perhaps we could talk."

Chenkang Chen, I'd learned, was a businessman and a rare breed—a man who cared. He'd taken caring to the limit, in fact, made an art

form of it. I envied him that, and yet I didn't understand. Had he mastered the pain? Or did he simply endure it?

"I need to be alone," I said.

He nodded, as if I'd said much more than those five words, and maybe I had. "But you are *not* alone. And you are breaking more than one heart."

Something sharp was cutting into me. My eyes misted over until I clenched my jaw and pulled up the tattered remains of the wall. "Chenkang, don't. You know it's pointless."

His eyebrows came together at a sharp angle, and suddenly he looked like some angry, ancient god. "I know only this: we like you. We need you with us. This is a special time, this Waking Cycle. It's a miracle, something that will never come again. Such alignments, do you realize how rare they are in life, how precious?"

I blinked. He was killing me.

"And one of us," he continued, his face now sad, "one of us bleeds even more than the rest. You have to come back."

Anger pushed my tears aside, became my salvation. "You and your gentle wisdom! Listen and I'll tell you a story. It's about lost treasure. It's about inevitable forces beyond anyone's control. It's about setting yourself up for the hardest fall of all and giving up control when you know—you *know*—that nothing you can do will change the way it has to end."

To my surprise, he nodded. "Yes. You will go your separate ways. And once your own module has slowed to nonrelativistic speed, your hours become her minutes and then your years her days. And it is true that now it is too late to change the arrangements, such matters as destination and Waking schedules being under the cybermind's strict control. But perhaps you miss the point of your story. And perhaps you are telling it to the wrong person."

I slumped. Truth is an impossible opponent. "If only...."

But he had gone.

And he had done what he had intended.

DAY SIX. TOGETHER IN THE GARDEN MODULE, WHERE TREES AND grasses and genecrafted oxymats replenished the air used by each successive group of Wakers. It was a beautiful place, the finest on the ship, and all the more beautiful for the love that blossomed there.

"JASON," SHE MURMURED, "WHY DID YOU MAKE IT SO DIFFICULT?"

We lay in each other's arms beneath the spreading limbs of an oak tree, looking not at the garden but into each other's eyes.

"I was afraid," I answered, honestly.

Her quick eyes hardened while remaining soft, which shouldn't have been possible, but then she transcended the realm of what was merely possible just by her very existence.

I sighed, raised my right wrist to show her the day-counter there. "Afraid of this," I said in answer to her unspoken question.

She smiled, but it was a sad smile, a smile full of might-have-beens. "One more day," she said, tears in her voice. "We could have had so much more if you hadn't run."

I felt hollow, empty. The urge to flee returned, briefly, but the wall had crumbled, and I knew it would take time to rebuild and that I would have to build it twice as strong.

We made love, again, while the leaves fell. It was autumn in the garden module. Somehow, that seemed appropriate. She surprised me, later, with the question.

"Might we Awaken together again?"

"No," I said. "I calculated it. Your cycle's ten and a half months; mine's twenty-eight. They don't coincide again for seven years. And my module detaches for Midway in three months anyway."

"Perhaps you can come with me, then, to Nocturnia. We could be happy there together."

For an incredible second I considered it. But the cost of such an extension was unthinkable. I'd barely met the price of passage to Midway.

"Then I will change to your module and go with you there," Aesha said brightly, her quick eyes working, her tone the insistent voice of insane reasonableness.

But what the hell? It was worth a try.

"STATE YOUR PURPOSE," SAID THE CYBERMIND.

We'd traveled deep into the ship, past the Sleeper chambers and the module junctions and all the way along the ship's spine to the core of the cybermind. Here the web of synapses glowed, tracing wispy threads between the macroneurons of the living machine that guided the sleepship in its travels.

"We'd like to request a change," I said, squeezing Aesha's hand, feeling her squeeze back. It was daunting to be standing here, within a mind one hundred times greater than my own.

"Changes are not acceptable. Module deployment must proceed as scheduled."

"Not a change in module deployment," I said. "We want to change our individual module assignments."

Some of the neural strands brightened while others dimmed. It only lasted a second.

"Specify."

"Aesha Devora," Aesha said. "I paid for passage to Nocturnia via Module 6. I wish to change to Module 1 and go to Midway instead."

This time the cybermind took several seconds as it reshuffled data within one tiny part of its available awareness.

"Unacceptable."

My heart sank.

"Why?" Aesha squeaked. Her voice, and the way her face paled, told me how right I'd been before, how very wrong it had been to hope.

"The colony on Midway maintains a strict controlled growth policy. At present there are no available citizenship slots."

"But surely...." I started.

"Further conversation on this topic is nonproductive. Aesha Devora may not alter her destination. There are no exceptions to the controlled growth policy."

Anger washed through me. "Hey! You're just a goddam machine. If we want—"

"That tone is hostile. Its continuation will result in your immediate return to suspension."

"You can't—"

Aesha's hand on my shoulder stopped me. "We tried," she said to me, quietly. "Kristine told me it might be so, but I hoped. Don't lose for us the one final day we have together."

I swallowed, looked into her eyes, then turned my cold gaze on the core of the cybermind. "Fine," I lied, "we accept your decision."

But the plan was forming even as we departed the core.

"IT'S JUST A MACHINE," I SAID LATER, MY WHISPER HARSH IN THE CONfines of our hidden place near the main drive cylinder. It was cramped here, but the background noise level drowned out enough of our voices to confuse the cybermind's snooping devices.

"It's not just that," Aesha said. "It's the colony's policy. We have to respect that. They don't want their world to become another Earth."

I shook my head. "Look, they would never know. One of us could hide, somehow, or we could fake the census, or get into the computer and—"

I stopped. Her gaze was steady on me and, my God, she was such a part of me I could feel her thoughts as though they were my own.

"You're right," I sighed.

She cupped my cheek in her palm. "You're still running," she said. "You've done it for so long you don't know any other way."

I said nothing. Words were just another sort of brick with which to construct another sort of wall. But as we held each other in silence, it crystallized in my mind that I hadn't been running *away* from something but *toward* it, and that this was the something, and that I could never, ever let it go.

Her hair was soft in my fingers. I knew what had to be done.

DARKNESS. A PLACE BEYOND THE RESTRICTED ZONES, SO DEEP WITHIN the ship that no sentry-drones patrolled here and no crystal eyes watched to report my movements to the cybermind. I moved stealthily, nonetheless. I was too aware of the consequences of discovery.

Here, in the heart of the beast. In the place where all modules converge and the life spirit flows like water to maintain the ten thousand frozen humans seeking escape from the congestion and decadence of an abused and poisoned Earth. At my fingertips, the source of their dreamless Sleep.

I reached out. In the darkness, I found the great mechanism set into the floor, its mass indicative of the power it commanded. Manual override. Here, no cyberdevice could pry, no electronic subsystem could dictate, no trick of science could intrude. A simple flip of a safety catch. A single wrenching twist, and the liquid nitrogen flow would stop.

And the Sleepers would become Wakers.

I shivered. Such a risk I was taking. The sleepship had never been designed for ten thousand *conscious* passengers. The food would go first, then the water and the air. But it wouldn't come to that. The cybermind would act; it would be forced to act. It would steer us to the nearest habitable world, Tempest, less than three months away subjective. There we would all depart, to live on that watery orb, and while many would grumble of plans gone awry and goals dashed apart on the storm-tossed shores, Aesha and I would be together, and no one could do anything to bring our togetherness to an end.

My fingers touched hard metal, and I felt the safety, cold and stubborn. I pressed it. There was a sharp *snick*. I reached for the flow control wheel.

"Jason."

I stopped. I could sense her near me in the darkness, and though I couldn't see her, I knew exactly where she stood.

"What are you doing here?" I asked.

Footfalls, soft and measured. Then the air speaking of her closeness. "Oh, Jason. What have I done to you, that you could think of such a thing?"

I closed my eyes, but there wasn't a darkness deep enough to hide the misery within me. "Aesha, it's the only way. I can't let you go. I can't let it end."

Still, no touch from her, only her nearness, the scent of her, the warmth, and her thoughts.

"Not this way. Think of the others. Is our happiness worth the pain of ten thousand lives interrupted? And Jason, what if you're wrong?"

I squeezed the wheel more tightly, its lifeless metal unyielding beneath my fingers. I still couldn't see her. There was that to be thankful for.

"Jason," she whispered, "think. Think how I would feel if I became the cause of something terrible. Think how *you* would feel. If you've misjudged the cybermind's response, you could be sending all those people to their deaths."

My hand was trembling now. "No more words!" I hissed. A thin film of sweat had formed between my palm and the wheel, but my grip was still firm, even when I felt her cool fingers on top of my own. The universe seemed to contract until nothing existed but my hand on that wheel. It was frozen—unable to let go yet unwilling to do as I commanded. Her fingers spoke to mine in the silent language of the flesh, first trying gently persuasive caresses, then peeling each of my fingers back, one by one, until the wheel had slipped from my grasp.

"My poor Jason," she said, now clenching my hand in hers and turning me toward her. I felt the warmth of her breath on my neck. For one insane instant I wanted to lash out at her, to stop her from stopping me. She seemed to sense it: her hand tightened around mine. Then I was pulling her to me, hugging her fiercely in the darkness. I could feel the dampness of her face against my chest.

"Let it go," she whispered.

I moaned. It was an animal sound in the darkness, the sound of agony and destiny acknowledged, the sound of surrender. She moaned too, though not so loudly, and then we wept together, clinging to each other so tightly that our souls merged into one.

"I can't lose you," I whispered. "I can't. I won't. I can't go on alone."

My face was slick with our shared tears. But when she spoke, her voice was clear, and even in the darkness I could see her eyes flicking up to mine, soft with feeling but hard, hard with knowing.

"You don't have to," she said. "You never have to lose what we have. Hold onto the now. Make it last forever."

And I understood. *This* was forever. Eternity lived in each of these moments, these precious, stolen moments.

AND SO IT CAME TO THE SEVENTH DAY, AND GEORGE AND CHENKANG and the immortal Katherine and all the others had entered their Sleep, renouncing consciousness after their teary-eyed farewells. They had known all along what I had never discovered until now. If you run fast enough, you leave *everything* behind—not only the pain but also the joy. And then you're alone, and you've never even learned how to live.

AND I UNDERSTOOD...THEY HAD KNOWN ALL ALONG what I had never discovered until now. If you run fast enough, you leave everything behind—not only the pain but also the joy. And then you're alone, and you've never even learned how to live.

Aesha. My other self, my soul mate. There, in her half-sealed cocoon, the vapors already fogging the lower half, only her face exposed to the warm air of the Waking Cycle. I bent to kiss her. Then I pulled back, kneeling there, feeling the pain and this time savoring it for what it was.

"I love you," I said.

She nodded, her eyes sliding to the side to look out at me. "I'll never forget," she promised. Her words were already slow and slurred. The Sleep was beginning to take her.

"Have a great life," I said, and I kissed my finger and put it to her lips, and in a moment she weakly returned the kiss. Then the seal was closing, and through the transparent covering I watched her face soften into a peaceful, dreamless Sleep, and I knew that by the time she awoke again I would have lived my life on Midway and died, long before, but also that I would live on, in her memory.

Once, I thought, she smiled, and then the covering fogged up and her face faded to a smudge of color and then became completely obscured by a delicate tracery of ice crystals.

I left her module for my own, my thoughts of Aesha lingering as I watched the hatchways clang shut, separating us forever. But even as I lay within my own cocoon, awaiting the blast of cold that would bring on my final Sleep, I knew that I could never, really, be without her. We're all connected, in some way that transcends space or time, and the only true barriers are the ones we build ourselves.

My skin tingled in anticipation. No, I would never rebuild that wall around my soul. I would live my past as well as my future, all in every present moment, and let it hurt as much as it wanted to. That would only remind me that I was alive. And what is pain but the memory of joy? And what is joy but a kindlier form of pain?

Liquid nitrogen offered its narcotic caress. The thought of running never crossed my mind. □

PAT MORRISSEY

The warrior, the assassin, and the thief had each been captured, but the tortured ghosts still needed a hero.

THE HERO TRAP

BY JO CLAYTON

Illustration by Pat Morrissey

IN THE CENTER OF A LARGE IRREGULAR glade, surrounded by patches of brush and clumps of pale, dry grass, the tarn was a circle of darkness, a mirror to catch the stars in the patch of clear sky overhead.

As Hallah slid wearily from the saddle, a badger drinking at the far side lifted its head, stared at her a moment, and then went waddling off.

She tickled the horse under his jaw and smiled as he snorted and leaned into her. "It's been a hungry, dry ride, Spurge, my friend. And slow as a snail crawling up a wall. Let's hope this is a sign that things are getting better."

As she watched the horse drink, the wind picked up and began teasing short hairs from her travel bun, hairs which then began to tickle her face and neck. She glanced over at the narrow track vanishing into the trees at the far side of the glade. "Smells like rain. I was hoping to make the Plain before we put it to bed, but it doesn't look likely, does it. All right, that's enough for now." She led the horse a short distance from the tarn to a spot where the grass was thickest, took off the bridle, and tugged loose the lead rope attached to the halter he wore beneath it. "Let's see. This bit of brush looks stable enough to remind you

that you aren't going anywhere, and it's close enough to let you drink when you want. If you're as tired as I am, old horse, you're not going to do anything but graze a while. I'll save the last of the grain for when we find a place to lay up."

HALLAH SPLASHED WATER ON HER FACE, RUBBED GRIT FROM HER BROWS and lashes, then dipped a tin travel cup into the tarn and lifted it, dripping and full, enjoying the sense of plenitude after the days of thirst. She sloshed the first mouthful around and spat it out, then emptied the cup in three long gulps. It was good mountain water, cold and clean, with that touch of bitterness which killed thirst faster than anything that came from a well.

Out in the middle of the pool, one of the reflected stars trembled, then spiraled up out of the water. "Lightning bug? I didn't think they lived this high." She dipped the cup again, but before she could drink, the point of light came whipping toward her, trailing a gossamer thread that was only just visible.

The thread touched her face. Numbness spread through her body. Alarmed, she jumped to her feet and tried to brush the web strand away as she took a step backward. More of the light points from the tarn joined the first, winding her in their towlines, glimmering threads that turned her body to stone.

The moon rose, fattening toward full, its light turning cloud edges to silver as it slipped behind them—thin streaky clouds that thickened as the wind grew stronger and the hours passed. Hallah stood like a post planted beside the water, listening to Spurge move about, nipping the new growth off the brush, ingesting grass as if he were inhaling it rather than grazing.

Now and then the horse came to the tarn to drink. Once he stopped to nuzzle her and seemed baffled by her silence, but when she tried to talk to him, her low shapeless growls frightened him and sent him trotting away. She tensed, but he stopped when the rope tugged at him. He didn't fight it, just started grazing again.

Her hair blew across her eyes, tickling her remorselessly; she couldn't move a hand to push it back or turn her head away from the wind. A drop of rain broke on her nose, then two more hit her forehead and trickled into her eyes.

She cursed the guild laws and Guild Master Groensacker for making her run and getting her into this mess.

Cursing without a voice was pointless.

Words in the head. Couldn't even have the satisfaction of feeling them tear from her mouth.

A SMALL DARK CREATURE CRAWLED ROUND A PATCH OF BRUSH AND crouched on the far side of the tarn, looking at her through the veils of rain. At first Hallah thought it was the badger come back, or perhaps a wolf. Then it straightened, and a glow bloomed deep within the water as if to greet it. As the eerie light spread, Hallah saw it was a girl, a child rather, no more than eight or nine years old, tiny and shaggy, with coarse dark hair and dressed in homespun shirt and trousers.

"Caught you, didn't it." Flash of white teeth in a small, pointed face. "I can get you loose, hero." She set small, grubby paws on her hips. "But we set a price on it. You wanna pay it?"

Hallah managed a nod.

"All right. My use name is Azere. Say my name when you make the agreement, then say yours." She moved round the tarn, took hold of Hallah's left hand, and lifted it so it was held flat, palm up. She put a small pebble on the palm and closed the fingers over it. It was an ordinary speckled pebble, like any of a thousand in the bed of a stream, dull, gray, and uninteresting—until Hallah felt heat racing through her, felt the rigidity in her face and throat start melting.

"Swear, hero. Swear to me that you will do what we ask."

Hm. Second time she said we. Watch your feet, woman. You don't know what's going on here. "Azere," she said. Her voice was husky, the vowels blurred, but she could speak again. "I, Hallah, will do what you ask, with this condition: I am only bound till the moon reaches full, then I am free of obligation to you and yours." *Or until I climb on Spurge and get out of here, whichever comes first.*

The child nodded. "Good enough." She uncurled Hallah's fingers, took the pebble back, and tucked it away as she retreated to the far side of the tarn. She set her hands on her hips again and began to sing, words Hallah could hear but not comprehend. It was as if they evaporated the moment they slipped through her ears.

A few moments later, she could move again.

Her clothes were soaked, her hair was plastered to her head, dripping runnels down her neck, and anger sat in a hot sour ball in her stomach. "What was that, and was it you who set it?"

Azere's eyes flicked away from her. She backed off a few steps, stopped at the edge of a patch of brush. "It's a trap for a hero. And that's you." She ducked behind the brush and ran, the sound of her bare feet lost after a few seconds in the hiss of the rain and the howl of the wind.

Hallah scraped hair and rain from her eyes and looked around for the horse.

Spurge was out at the end of the tether, head up, ears forward; he seemed to be staring at the darkness under the trees. She couldn't see anything there, no movement except the twitch of leaves and branches in the wind.

"Spooks, eh? Let's get out of here before something else happens." She reached for the tether and swore as she saw the other end of the rope fall from the halter ring. She started toward him, moving smoothly and carefully, using her voice to try to hold him. "Spurge, easy ol' boy, stay still, nothing's out there, I'm here, I'm…oh *merd*! Everything I own is on his back."

He had begun walking away from her, not hurried or compelled, more as if he were listening to a voice calling him and responding to it with mild delight.

Hallah bent, snatched up the rope, and jerked it tight, using her belt knife to cut off as much of it as she could retrieve. Then she started across the grass, coiling the rope as she walked, hurrying but trying not to spook him.

Spurge vanished into the trees. Hallah slipped the rope coils over her shoulder and trotted after him. As she left the glade, darkness settled round her so thick that she could only track him by the dull clop-clop of his hooves.

She tried walking faster, but the footing was too treacherous for hurry. Twice her boot slid on a mud patch and she nearly split herself in half trying to regain her balance. She didn't dare fall; by the time she was on her feet again, Spurge would have moved beyond hearing.

Some indeterminable time later, the dull anechoic thuds of Spurge's hooves acquired a hard, hollow ring. At the same time, rain stopped hitting her face and thick fog closed about her.

She extended her arms, swung them cautiously about, but touched nothing.

Magic. The stink of it was all round. Assassins were more honest than these sorcerers eeling about, tying strings on people so they could jerk them around like puppets. As long as she could remember, she'd despised magic and all those who dabbled in it. She sighed and moved on, setting her feet warily, moving her arms in slow arcs ahead and to the side.

Another change. The clip-clop she followed was muted again, the iron of Spurge's shoes no longer ringing loudly. The fingers of her left hand brushed against wet, cold stone, then a slather of moss that melted where she

Magic. The stink of it was all round. Assassins were more honest than these sorcerers eeling about, tying strings on people so they could jerk them around like puppets.

touched it and turned to slime. Despite her disgust, she kept the tips of her fingers sliding along the stone until it suddenly dropped away and she felt a breeze against the side of her face.

The fog ahead of her thinned and took on a flickering reddish glow. *A fire*, she thought. Enough light to show her Spurge had stopped and was stretching his neck to nip at branches of a tree that was a dark blur ahead of him. She moved cautiously toward him.

Her hand closed on the saddle. She leaned against him as her knees went liquid with relief. "*Mierd*, Spurge, what got into you? Never mind. Let's get out of here."

She set her foot in the stirrup and started to swing up—but instead gasped and fell to the ground. Pain was liquid fire flowing through her. Pain as great as when Membruda's son cut off her breasts and threw her in the fire. Pain that stripped away thought and humanity and left her grovelling in the dirt.

"Tried to go back, did you?" A man's voice. Acerbic, amused.

She groaned and tried to push up. Hands caught her under the arms and lifted her to her feet.

"It'll help if you can take a step toward the fire. That'll satisfy the curse."

Leaning heavily on his arm, she did that and the pain was gone, the weakness gone. "What…"

She let the arm go, stepped back, and stood looking at him. He was small and wiry. Young. Perhaps half her age. Black tunic and trousers, black gloves, black boots, a ruby teardrop dangling from one ear. His hair curled exuberantly, black and shining. He was cleanshaven, with a shadow on the jowls.

"Better, isn't it. Really does catch you hard, that curse." He touched his brow in a salute of a sort and grinned at her. "You best not fool with your horse yet. Want me to lead him for you?"

She grimaced, not liking the idea. But there wasn't much choice. "All right. My name's Hallah. Yours?"

"They call me Claw. Heard it so much I forgot the one I was born with."

"Uh huh." She walked from the trees into the circle of firelight. Another man sat crosslegged by the fire, watching a pair of rabbit carcasses roast on a spit held up by two forked sticks.

He was a big man, dressed in a greasy leather vest and canvas trousers, his face a weathered mask painted red and black by the light from the coals. His feet were bare and had the dry gray horn on the soles which meant that was their usual condition. He wore his hair long, pulled back around a bald spot the size of a small saucer, and tied with a greasy thong. He glanced at her and then looked away, his lack of interest as loud as if he had shouted it.

"Don't mind him, Hallah. Zack's vocabulary is about six words and a grunt. You hungry? One of those rabbits is mine and you can have half. You know anything about cooking? Seeing you're a woman, I had hopes…"

"Woman? That?" The big man's voice was a rusty rumble.

"Eh? You inspired him, Hallah. Two whole words I hadn't heard before in the three weeks I been here."

"Three farkin' weeks?"

"Twenty-one unfarkin' days. Zack's not my type."

Zack snorted and turned the spit again, one side of the rabbits being blackened to his satisfaction.

Grease dripped from the meat and sizzled on the coals, the smell waking hunger in her. "Thanks," she said. She dropped to the ground and sat with her legs folded before her. The heat of the fire felt good; she was half frozen from the rain pounding on her and the long, cold walk.

Claw dropped beside her. "About the cooking…"

She thought a moment, eyes moving from Zack to Claw. *A little warning can save a heap of irritation.* "I don't cook and I don't take in washing," she said finally. "I just retired from the Assassin's Guild. Folks get nervous if you're wearing the veil and messing around with food."

"Huh? Retired? I thought you couldn't once you took the oath."

"You can't. I did."

"Oh." He ran his tongue across his teeth, making his lips bulge. "How long ago?"

"Round a year."

"Then you're lucky or smart, maybe both. So what the hell you doing here?"

She shrugged. "That's the question, isn't it. Why are any of us here?"

He slipped a small knife from his sleeve and began playing with it, throwing it up and catching it, showing off his nimble fingers. "Best you see that for yourself."

"What?"

"In the morning."

Across the fire Zack lifted the spit from the supports, twisted a leg on one of the carcasses. Apparently satisfied with the feel, he slid the end rabbit off the spit into a pannikin, then set the spit back over the fire.

"I think that means dinner's done. No salt, Hallah, no garnishes, just half-raw half-charred rabbit. Shall we eat?"

HALLAH WOKE WHEN SUNLIGHT TOUCHED HER EYELIDS. THERE WAS AN odd quality to the light, an extra brilliance that reached her even before she opened her eyes. She rolled out of the blankets and got to her feet, feeling like the inside of a vulture's gullet. She'd slept in her clothes, including the boots. She wanted her knives handy in case Claw or Zack decided he was desperate enough to ignore the grunge she wore like a second skin.

Her saddle and the rest of her gear were heaped where she'd left them, and Spurge was out in the sunshine, grazing warily, lifting his head continually to look at something she couldn't see from where she stood. She ran her hands through her hair and sighed at its stiff oiliness. "A bath, a shampoo, and clean clothes. *!Maytre*, give me those and I'd lay down and let Groensacker's cubs carve me to bone."

Chewing on a bit of trail bar she'd found in the bottom of one of her saddlebags, she strolled from the brushy hollow where she'd slept. "*!Maytre!*"

Across the meadow, on the far side of a small creek, a glass castle shimmered, insubstantial as a soap bubble, the area where it touched

As she watched, a man in armor on an armored horse appeared at the highest point and came riding down the arch. No. A phantom, not a man...neither he nor the horse made a sound.

the ground a glittery band of angled shards shifting about so fast that her eyes hurt when she tried to look at them. Not a castle really, no curtain wall, just a square keep with a round tower at each corner. The keep itself seemed wholly transparent, but there were so many differently angled glass walls inside that what it held—if anything—was impossible to determine.

"*!Maytre!*"

A roadway as insubstantial as moonlit mist arched suddenly up and away from the keep's main entrance, leaping for the sky, the far end melting into nothing. As she watched, a man in armor on an armored horse appeared at the highest point and came riding down the arch. No. A phantom, not a man...neither he nor the horse made a sound as they moved toward the keep. Just before he reached the entrance, he turned and looked at her. His visor was pushed up and she saw a pale face, eyes dark with horror. His mouth moved, opened wide. She heard nothing but nonetheless knew it was a cry for help.

"See why I didn't try telling you?"

Hallah looked round. "Claw, what's going on? Who's that man or whatever he is?"

"Now that you see it, you know as much as we do." He frowned. "You didn't get the dream?"

"What dream?"

"Funny. Zack and me had it first night each of us got here. There's this voice like wind down a hole. It says, 'destroy the Ysunaid.' Repeats it over and over till you're ready to run your head into a tree trunk just to get the thing to stop. Ysunaid. We figure that has to be the keep there."

"Huh. No. There was nothing like that." She spoke absently as she watched a child come stumbling along the road, a girl of five or six who seemed to be fighting a grip that dragged her on despite her struggles. Before she went into the keep, she looked at Hallah also, her mouth moved, she put her arms out—then she was pulled onward and vanished through the archway.

"Zack and me, we got so bored sitting around watching the parade, we decided we'd try anything to get outta here. We tried the easy way, you know, going in the front door. That didn't work. You lay a hand on that thing, it throws you ass over neck, and you feel like you been hit by lightning. I talked Zack into letting me stand on his shoulders and I flipped myself onto the road. Near broke my neck when I went right through it. We tried ropes, we tried ladders, we tried hacking down a tree and battering our way in. No joy in any of 'em."

Hallah moved closer to the creek, her eyes fixed on the keep. Claw came along with her. She didn't think he was trying to walk quietly, but his steps were so nearly soundless that she had a fair idea of what his occupation was. *If a thief couldn't find a way in...and why didn't I have the dream?*

"When the trap caught you and that child came, did you set a limit on the promise?"

"Nah, I figured I say the words the kid wanted to hear, then I was done with it. You?"

"Only made two bargains in my life without a limit, once when I swore the guild oath and once when I quit. Never again. How far round this thing can you go?"

"No point in that. It's all the same whichever direction you come at it."

She squatted beside the creek, collected a handful of water-polished pebbles, then moved along the bank till she found the tree Claw and Zack had dropped for a bridge. Claw followed her across the trunk and nearly stepped on her heels when he jumped to the far bank. He was starting to irritate her, sticking so close to her, but she didn't say anything.

She stopped in the meager shadow of a crooked, twisted tree, slipped her sling from her waistband, and smoothed out the leather. She pressed one of the pebbles into the pocket, stepped away from the tree, and started the sling whirring. When it was up to speed, she released the pebble, then stood with a hand shading her eyes.

The pebble bounced off the glass with a sharp click, but did no discernable damage. She shrugged, slipped the rest of the stones into a pocket with the sling, and walked closer.

The glare was so bad she could barely see anything. She turned her head aside and reached out to brush the tips of her fingers across the glassy surface.

"Hey, you don't want to do tha...."

Claw's last word was swallowed by the loud crack as lightning jumped from the wall and ran along her arms; crooked wires of lightning crackled about her body. The ends of her hair stood out from her head and she could smell it burning.

Cautiously she backed away. The discharges weakened until all that was left were a few snaps and crackles as the bits of the lightning jumped from her hands to her body. "Hm. When you touch it, it doesn't feel like glass at all."

Claw shrugged. "I didn't feel much of anything except wham."

"Hm." She turned and went back to the tree bridging the creek, shooed Claw across, then settled herself on the trunk and began a close examination of the keep, sliding her eyes along it from the black roof to the broken glitter at the base. She saw nothing she could understand or explain, but she kept looking.

Claw got restless and plagued her with questions about what she was doing, but she ignored him. One of the first lessons she learned in the guild was the importance of patiently gathering information before she did the work.

After a while he went away, but she still watched, trying to puzzle out every nuance in the shifts of soft light and glare within the walls of the keep.

She began to catch glimpses of faces like black line drawings, all the color and modeling washed away, pieces of faces, sliding, turning, hundreds of them. And there was a pattern to the shifting of the internal walls, a slow pulsing, as though the building were breathing. Building? Maybe not a built thing at all, but a creature like a hard-shell jellyfish, but larger and on land.

Feeding. Yes, that makes sense.

All day they came, one by one, ghosts on the roadway, always alone, men, women, poor and wealthy...some struggling...some meekly acquiescent...all terrified...all looking around a last time

before they were swallowed...pleading soundlessly for help that wouldn't come....

When the sun went down, the keep vanished. Hallah walked across the flat barren stone where it had been, then went back to camp thinking furiously.

THE NEXT DAY HALLAH WAS BACK ON THE LOG BRIDGE, WATCHING THE keep. The wind was stronger this morning, clouds were scudding across the patch of sky visible between the high cliffs. Last winter's dead leaves and petals from this spring's blossoms blew against the keep and burned to ash, but a small brown bird landed on the roof and dug into the cracks around the tarry black tiles for nearly half an hour before flying away again unharmed. She noted that. It didn't seem useful at the moment, but that bird was the first thing she'd seen survive contact with the keep.

Around noon, Zack came padding across the grass. He stood at the end of the tree trunk bridge and watched her for several moments before he spoke. "You're a hunter," he said. "You know how to wait. Catch."

He tossed her a round of hard bread, then a tin dipper. Then he squatted on the bank and settled in to watching with her.

Late in the afternoon, the clouds lowered, darkened. There was a heavy smell of rain in the wind that touched Hallah's face.

Before the first drop fell, the roadway was gone, sucked inside the keep like a toad's tongue. The glitter diminished gradually until the walls went from crystal to cloudy quartz. When the rain started, the drops hit a sphere that enclosed the keep and its towers, making it visible as they slid down the outside. Hallah jumped to her feet, ran across the bridge, and started for that globe of nothingness, intending to brush it with her fingertips as she had the keep wall.

Zack's hand closed on her arm and pulled her back.

"I whanged that with a rabbit I held by the ears and all't was left was the ears."

"You're talking a lot."

"Got something to say."

"Any place we can get out of this wet?"

"Under the trees is all."

HALLAH HUDDLED UNDER A THICK-NEEDLED FIR, A BLANKET PULLED round her shoulders. "Where's Claw?"

"Hunting. His day for it." Zack was a short distance off, leaning relaxed against the trunk of an ancient wild plum, petals from its blooms settling with pale, pink delicacy on his head and shoulders.

"Now?"

"Rain's good time. Holes ain't deep, stone's too close. Holes flood, catch all you need, no trouble."

"If that thing...mm...Ysunaid...is afraid of water..."

"Tried it."

"So what happened?"

"Went thick and dark like you saw, then like to kill us, slammin' one of those towers down on us." He pulled his legs up as the rain began coming through the outer leaves of the plum and bouncing off his feet. "Tried fire. Thought maybe it'd crack. Ashed the wood faster'n we could pile it up."

"Acted fast both times? Like it was afraid?"

"Unh."

She let her head fall back against the rough bark, closed her eyes. A glimmer of an idea was stirring in her head, but she wasn't too sure how far she wanted to push it.

"Moon should be near full," she said. "All these clouds, hard to tell...what would you say, Zack?"

"No moon here."

She jerked straight, her eyes opening wide. "What!"

"Figure this is some other place. Got stars, yeh. No moon."

She stared at him a moment longer, then she started laughing. "And I thought..." She hiccuped, giggled. "And I thought I was so smart." She doubled over, rocking back and forth as she laughed.

Zack shrugged, took his belt knife from its sheath, and began cleaning the muck from under his fingernails, waiting patiently for the fit of hysteria to end.

She coughed and sat up, embarrassed by the outburst and determined to ignore it. "It's alive, isn't it."

He grunted.

"Alive...." She gazed beyond him at the gray rain slanting down. Drops were coming through the needles above her, a few of them reaching her blanketed head, her knees. "If we could break the skin...raise a rash...crash through...poison it...you look like you've been in an army or two."

He slipped the knife back in its sheath and scratched at the stubble on his face. "Some."

"Use a sling?"

"Have."

"Think you could build a trebuchet, or at least something close enough that'd work like that?"

"Might could."

"A lot of birds in this place. Might be eggs, maybe some fair sized ones?"

"Blow the eggs, put poison in 'em?"

"No. Soap."

"Huh?"

"Good lye soap like your mama used to make. Since it doesn't like plain water, I'm betting soap would eat a hole right through its skin." She got to her feet. "I'll go pull the front shoes off my horse, you find Claw and bring in as many rabbits as you can. We're going to need the fat."

ZACK BROUGHT HER A PAIR OF BATTERED TIN POTS WITH BAILS ON THEM from the place where he'd stowed his gear. "Always got pots. Food's gone, you boil up messes of greens and leather. Hate soup. Means it's choke or starve time. Got any rope?"

"Brought it. Coiled up over there."

AS HALLAH WORKED, MEMORIES CAME BACK...THE END OF SUMMER rendering...the great black potash kettles of her Hammar folk...the fires burning in them for days...girls carrying the ashes to the soap cauldrons...women emptying them into the seething fat...boiling and straining and boiling some more. Her aunts would have turned up their noses at the crude mess she was producing, but it would do the job. It had to.

CLAW WATCHED HER DIP UP THE THICK GRAY OOZE FROM THE POT AND pour it with slow care into the funnel she'd made from a pair of fresh plucked leaves. "You really expect that soap stuff is going to work?"

"I don't know."

"Stinks."

"Mm hm."

"We sighted in the trebuchet this morning. Came near to breaking at a couple of places, but Zack, he braced it, knocked in some extra pegs, and wrapped more rope around the weak points, and he says it'll be all right." He took the egg she handed him and, with an easy delicacy of touch, used the saved egg white to glue a bit of dead leaf over the hole, then set the egg aside to dry. "We do it tomorrow?"

"Mm hm. Soon's the Ysunaid is in and settled. And we should have the horses saddled and ready."

"Yeah. You really think it'll work?"

"We'll see, won't we."

HALLAH WHIRLED THE SLING, THEN LOOSED THE EGG. "HAH! GROENsacker," she yelled. "One in the eye." It crashed against that area in the keep where the inner planes were thickest and the number of anguished eyes staring out of them the greatest. The lye soap bubbled and hissed and she laughed aloud. "Got you, vysser."

She loosed another, then another.

The patch of soap grew larger, attacking the skin, eating it away. "Good stuff." Her own skin was red and raw from handling it and she could imagine the hurt it was doing to Ysunaid; she smiled grimly as she got the next egg ready.

Continued on page 88

VISIONS AND

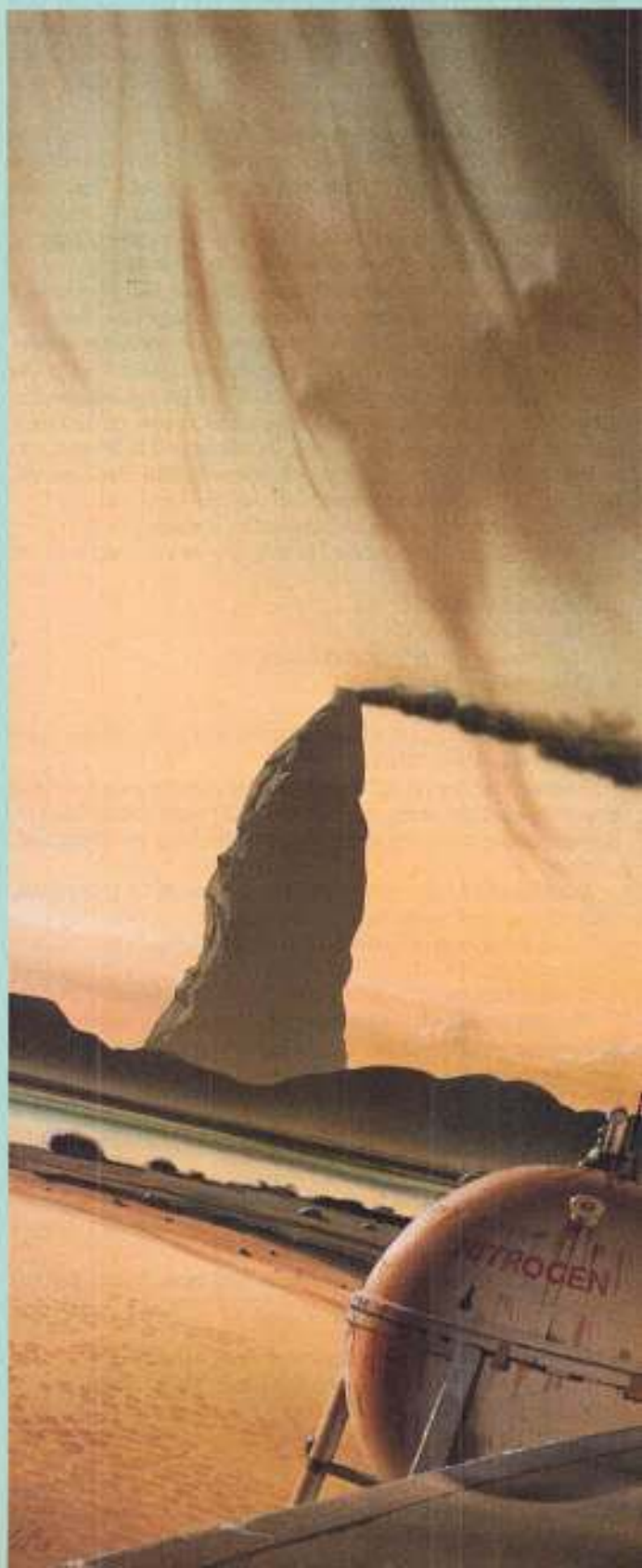
Kirinyaga's creator profiles England's hard SF architect.

BY MIKE RESNICK

This is going to be a little different from the typical Gallery column, which is usually written by a long-time friend of the artist.

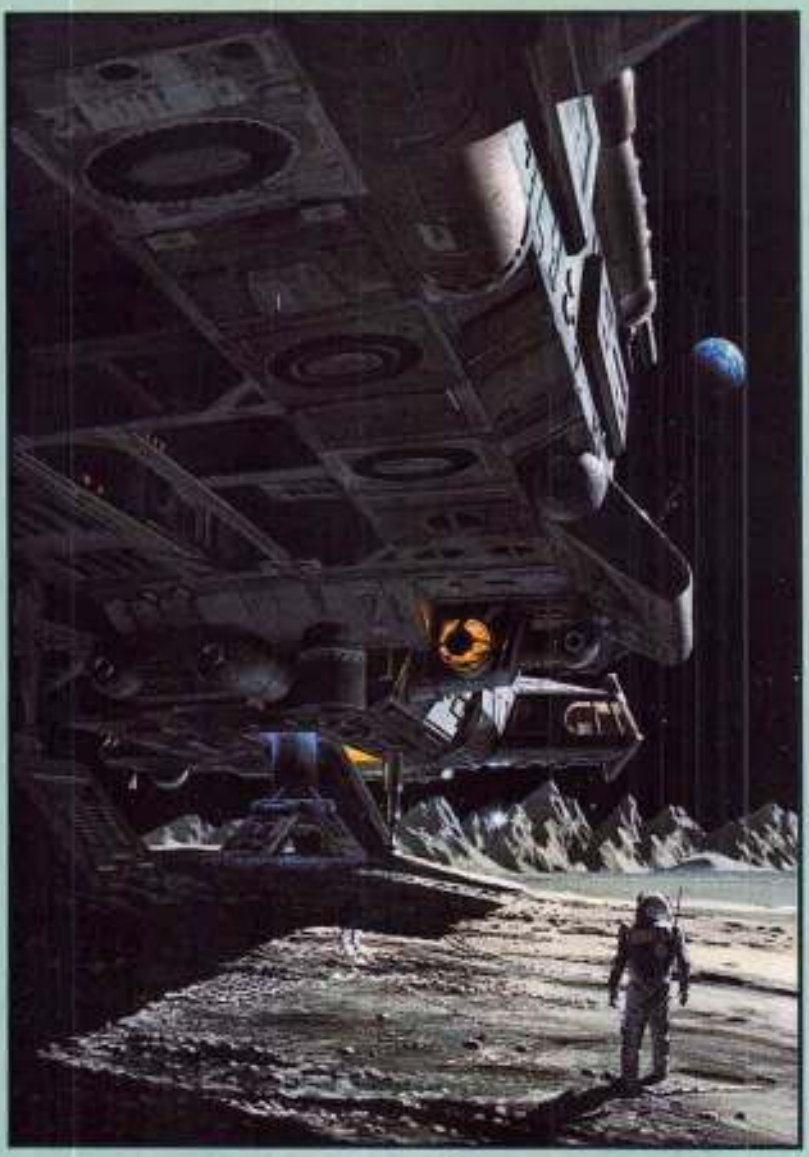
You see, I've never met Chris Moore. I can't give you two decades—or even two minutes—worth of anecdotes about him. I can't tell you about all the wonderful paintings I've commissioned from him as an editor, for though I edit anthologies from time to time, I have never commissioned a cover from anyone. I can't even tell you about the brilliant cover paintings he's done for my novels, because to the best of my knowledge, he's never done one.

So why am I doing an appreciation of Chris Moore?



VOYAGES

Opposite: Philip K. Dick wrote in his novel Valis *of a groping for the divine, which the artist captures admirably. BELOW: The characters in Dick's* Ubik *did not know whether the world they occupied was real or not; Moore makes it real.*



For the simplest (and best) of all possible reasons: I like his work, and I'd like you to like it too.

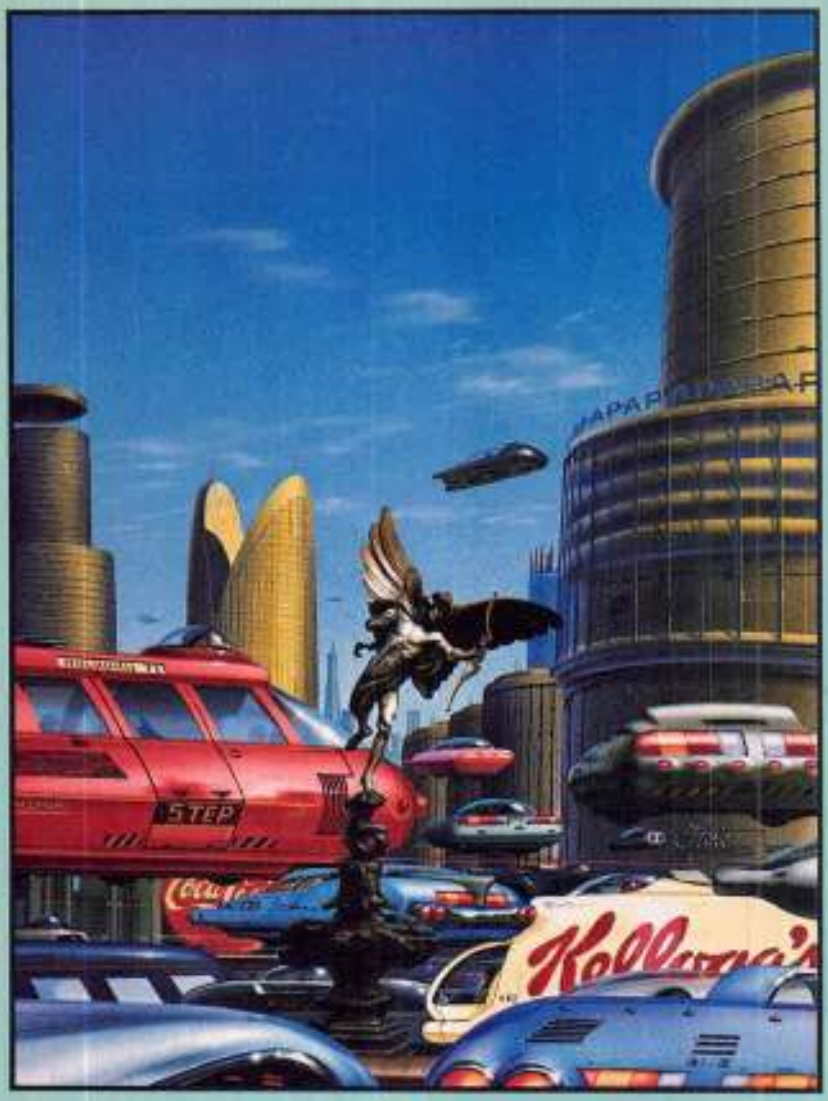
One of the things people loved about *2001: A Space Odyssey* when it first came out was that it put you there in space. You knew exactly what it felt like to travel without gravity, to dock and land at an orbiting space station, even to use a null-gravity toilet.

Well, Chris Moore puts you there just as firmly. Take a look at the cover to Orson Scott Card's *Enter the Traitor*. The ship not only looks like a futuristic eagle, but as you study it, it feels right. After all, who says that spaceships are all going to look like Hugo Award rockets? Here's one that's racy, and yet seems sound and practical. It's speeding for a spiral nebula, obviously not ours, and then Chris gives the painting that little killer touch that makes you do a double-take and say, "I've got to read this story!" (Which is just what cover art is supposed to do.) In this case, it's the huge, solitary planet floating nearby, with neither sun nor moons around it. *Has* it anything to do with the story? *That's* up to you to find out; Chris has done *his* job by piquing your curiosity with what would otherwise be a normal, run-of-the-mill astronomical painting.

Now consider his cover to Arthur C. Clarke's *Sentinel*. He gives you a rugged, alien landscape—but lots of artists can do that. Chris gives you a sense of the vastness of the setting and the courage, presumption, and even arrogance of Man by contrasting one small space-suited figure not only against the bleak, dead landscape of the planet, but also against the bleak, nonliving, almost planet-sized ship that brought him. There's a moon, and it too, is dead. One tiny figure exploring all this lifelessness, bending it to suit his needs. *That's* the essence of science fiction. Chris is at his best, I think, when he's illustrating hard science. His career began with a painting of a robot. It was good—of course—and so he was asked to do an entire series of robots.

"Someone asked me to do them, that's all," writes Chris. "Having been successful for the first time, people came along and said, 'Can you do something for us along the same lines and in the same vein?' And that's the way it's

ABOVE: Orson Scott Card's Enter the Traitor *is a volume of one of SF's most popular series. Here, Moore captures its cosmic sweep. LEFT: Space travelers witness a solar eclipse in this scene from Ben Bova's* Colony. *TOP LEFT: Arthur C. Clarke posits a monolith on the Moon in* Sentinel.



built up. I started doing science fiction paintings because someone *asked* me to do science fiction paintings."

Which is not to say that he's in any kind of rut, or that he can't do fantasy with equal aplomb. Take, for instance, his cover to *The Third Millennium*. It's an image Salvador Dali might be proud of: a classical statue amidst the detritus of a century of "progress": the familiar Kellogg's lettering, the floating cars, the round skyscraper which purposely does *not* inspire the wonder one finds in Frank R. Paul's old future cityscapes, the building with lips spread apart as if to gobble up any passing fliers. It's a nightmare image, and yet a gentle, nonviolent nightmare. This isn't a city on the brink of destruction; no, this is a city that actually functions, day in and day out—a far more frightening future, if you ask me.

For another nightmare fantasy, take a look at his cover to Philip K. Dick's *Valis*. Again, he's borrowed something from the surrealists and has made it his own, with the memorable image of the arm reaching out, groping, in an incomprehensible futurescape.

While Chris deals with traditional themes, his art is anything but traditional. The science *motif* seems to run through it, but while he has illustrated for such classical authors as Clarke, he has also done cover paintings for such nontraditional cyperpunks as William Gibson (*Burning Chrome*) and Bruce Sterling (*Islands in the Net*). He lives and works in Kent, England, but his art strikes responsive chords the world over, wherever science fiction pulls us forcefully out of our mundane lives and shows us what might be, if we can just hang around long enough for it to arrive.

In fact, I think the fact that he grew up in England can be seen in his work—not that he relishes showing us English countrysides, because he doesn't. But science fiction has respectable roots in England—it comes down to the current day from such giants as Wells and Stapledon, and has always been respected, and hence there is no shame in its traditions...whereas in America science fiction is the bastard stepchild of Hugo Gernsback and Edgar Rice Burroughs, and

its practitioners fought for almost half a century to eradicate the images of brass bras, bug-eyed monsters, and "that Buck Rogers stuff." Like it or not, over the years a spaceship has meant something different to American artists and readers than to British.

The integration of science and character is essential to a successful science fiction story, and this is also true of science fiction cover illustration. So let's examine a final painting by Chris Moore: the cover to Philip K. Dick's *Wink*. There are the space vehicles, and you can be sure they're accurate down to the last rivet. There's the mountain/volcano, spouting enough smoke to catch your attention and blowing it in such a way that you know this is a work of imaginative fiction. But dominating the painting is a human figure with a not-quite-discernable expression, its face half in sunlight, eyebrow arched quizzically, and half in shade. Chris' job was to interest you in the story elements and that mysterious character, and he did; *your* job is to read the story until you know enough about the protagonist to properly interpret and understand that expression.

I certainly wouldn't want to hold Chris Moore up as the only traditional illustrator who has adjusted to the needs of '90s science fiction, because he is just one of many who have excelled in this area. But because he lives in England and most of his work has appeared there, he is not as well known to American audiences as a number of his peers, and that, I submit, is an unacceptable oversight.

OPPOSITE: Chris Moore captures Brian Aldiss' satiric view of the future with his cover for the short story collection The Third Millennium. *ABOVE: Moore makes alien environments come to life, as in this scene of less-than-friendly first contact.*

By Damian Kilby

Mr. Punch and *Mr. Hero* make this a hot year for Mr. Gaiman.

Mr. Hero *was created by Neil Gaiman, currently the hottest writer in comics. Art by Rick Veitch.*

NEIL GAIMAN, CURRENTLY THE HIPPEST WRITER in comics, has two new projects coming out at about the same time this month. One is titled *Mr. Punch* and the other *Mr. Hero*, but in spite of the similar titles, these two could not be much further apart in subject matter or tone. They are linked only by the highly idiosyncratic approach that readers have come to expect from Mr. Gaiman.

Mr. Punch (Vertigo) is a moody tale of childhood memory, intertwined with the cruel plot of the traditional Punch and Judy puppet show. A single volume graphic novel, it contains just a touch of fantasy and is laced with a sense of mystery and unanswered questions.

Mr. Hero (Tekno Comix) is a semi-humorous science-fantasy, a monthly comic centered around a revived Victorian-era steam-powered robot and his modern-day street-waif companions. The central plot engine is their struggles with Mr. Hero's alien creator, who has designs of conquest over a multitude of other-dimensional worlds, including planet Earth.

Why is Neil Gaiman the hippest writer in the comic book industry? Because of *Sandman*. A monthly comic book in a mythic, fantasy vein, concerning Morpheus, the embodiment of Dream, *Sandman* is the centerpiece of DC Comics' upscale Vertigo line. Commercially and critically successful, with its adult complexity and rich layers of imagined worlds, *Sandman* has become *the* point of reference for comic books with the "for mature audiences" label.

The magic of *Sandman* is clearly in the writing. Artists have come and gone with each storyline change, but the quality has always remained. This writer takes risks all the time, freely following the twists and turns of his personal vision, treading all the traps of formula, and jumping from stories with historical backgrounds to the literal realm of Lucifer and to quiet stories of ordinary lives. At their best, Gaiman's tales in *Sandman* seem ready to sit on the shelf with the finest of contemporary fantasy and horror stories.

Gaiman has become a little bit of a hero/savior to those faithful fans who yearn to see more of the vast untapped potential of comics. He has stated that despite financial success, the *Sandman* series will be coming to a close, as he finishes saying all he wants to with this set of characters and ideas.

In the meantime, Gaiman has developed a legion of readers who have grown to trust his instincts and are willing to follow where he next chooses to lead.

Mr. Punch will not let down those looking for quality writing and original vision. And this book strikes a deeply personal tone, with all the trappings of an autobiographical memoir.

The adult narrator works through the pieces and textures of childhood memories, struggling to solve the mysteries of a summer spent on the coast of Gaiman's native England in the care of his grandparents. Punch and Judy become a horrifying, fascinating and possibly magical link to dark secrets in the narrator's own family.

The details of the story are rich—a little closer to what one expects from *The New Yorker* or *Paris Review* than from DC Comics—and it challenges the reader to ponder the nature of his or her own childhood memories. There is nothing sweet or cute here: it rings true with "real" childhood, balanced between curiosity, fear, and wonder—with no easy moral lessons supplied.

Mr. Punch is a beautiful package, a gorgeously printed, over-sized hardback with a $24.95 price tag. At first glance it looks like the most marvelous and lushly illustrated children's book you have ever seen. Closer examination reveals an intensity and fullness in the pictures of the sort one is not likely to ever find in children's literature.

Artist Dave McKean's images are powerful and uniquely presented, greatly upping the ante on Gaiman's story, adding emotional depth and emphasizing the surreal qualities of childhood. McKean, known for the stunning covers on *Sandman*, is a master of design and color. His multimedia collage techniques have to be seen to be truly appreciated. He elevates an already rich story into a major event in comics publishing.

In *Mr. Punch* he employs a combination of painting, drawing and photography, using a multitude of techniques within each of these disciplines. Amazingly, he shifts smoothly through all the different modes without ever striking the wrong emotional note in terms of the story.

Switching to the other end of writer Gaiman's spectrum of output we come to *Mr. Hero*, published by Big Entertainment, under the new Tekno Comix imprint. The full title on the magazine's cover will read *Neil Gaiman's Mr. Hero, The Newmatic Man*. Readers of the fine print will

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be surprised to discover that Gaiman is not the scriptwriter of this comic book. That duty falls to James Vance, who collaborates with artists Ted Slampyak and Bob McLeod.

This development is a little sad. Here Gaiman is trading on his popularity to become a brand name, possibly fooling some readers who associate and expect a certain level of quality and challenge with the name. This is reminiscent of the rash of "sharecropper" SF novels of the '80s, such as *Roger Zelazny's Alien Speeedway* and *Arthur C. Clarke's Venus Prime*. This marketing technique may or may not produce an entertaining read, but it never produces work of lasting import.

Tekno Comix looks to be made up entirely of the share-cropping of ideas supplied by big names. Other names in their stable include Leonard Nimoy, Mickey Spillane, and Anne McCaffrey. In the company's publicity their creations are referred to as "entertainment properties." Only time will tell if quality comics can be slipped through the corporate mentality of Big Entertainment.

Mr. Hero, starting with some fun, SF-ish ideas supplied by Gaiman might have a chance. It has a basic innocent-good-guys-versus-evil-bad-guys dynamic which guarantees that it will never be the kind of subtle, ambiguous story one expects from Gaiman.

But many of its ideas are pleasantly quirky, including the teaming of its steam-powered robot hero, imbued with Victorian mannerisms and ideals, and Jenny, the headstrong '90s street mime and would-be magician who reactivates him. The villainous, dinosaur-descended, Teknophage's mobile corporate headquarters (is Teknophage secretly the CEO of Big Entertainment?), his swirling, Victorian-styled Wheel of Worlds, and his penchant for designer clothes are details which hint at interesting possibilities.

Only the script of the first issue was available in time for this column, so I really only have limited information upon which to judge *Mr. Hero's* debut. It appears that we can expect a solid, well-paced comic, with a little humor, a little horror, and a predictable fight scene climax. The quirkiness and imagination are intact but encased within the traditional rhythms of commercial comics.

Writer Vance seems skillful within those limitations; perhaps he will be given a chance to grow into this series. I think we can expect something that's a little different from the average superhero but nothing as mature and challenging as has been associated with Neil Gaiman's name in the past.

His work on *Mr. Punch* demonstrates that Neil Gaiman has not let up on pushing the artistic envelope within the comics medium. Gaiman's work for Tekno Comix shows he truly has some intriguing science fantasy ideas up his sleeve.

It might prove interesting if he tried applying SF in one of his more personal works. Only time will tell if the use of his name on the cover of standard corporate products will water down his impact on readers and the comics medium.

Recent & Recommended

•Intelligent comic book readers have long hoped for creators who treat the medium with the same loving care that the finest novelists lavish on their prose. In this day of superheroes *uber alles*, it seems as if most writers and artists have given up trying.

So it was a definite treat and surprise to read John Bergin's *From Inside* (Kitchen Sink Press, $24.95, full color, trade paperback), a surreal odyssey of apocalypse and rebirth. Bergin is both writer and artist, and his other works include *Bone Saw*, *Morphine Dreams*, and *Brain Dead*. With a sense of paranoia worthy of Kafka, *From Inside* tells the story of a pregnant young woman forced to bequeath to her child a future of unending horror. Some unspecified time in the future, she rides a train across a post-holocaust landscape that threatens to destroy hope, all the while asking herself one of the eternal questions—how can we bring a child into a world we've almost destroyed? We bear witness as she agonizes over her choice, one far more poignant than the usual comics menu.

John Bergin's art and text are each up to the enormously ambitious task he has set himself, meaning that regardless of whether you are taking into account comics or straight prose, *From Inside* is an extraordinary storytelling triumph.

•There was a golden age of science fiction comics, but sadly, it passed before many of us were born. EC Comics was responsible for some of the finest SF ever published, adapting Ray Bradbury and others, and featuring art by greats such as Wally Wood, Al Williamson, and Frank Frazetta. But then, far too soon, the company that gave birth to these cosmic dreams was almost put out of business, whittled down to the lone publication of *Mad* magazine, destroyed by the paranoid '50s.

Forbidden 3-D (The 3-D Zone, 28 pages, $3.95) tells the sorry story of how comic books were blamed for juvenile delinquency, and how EC's horror comics brought down an SF empire.

Writer Ray Zone and artist Chuck Roblin have chosen to tell their story in the manner of the times and have themselves created a 3-D comic that lays out the case then made for and against comics. Ray Zone has made a career of 3-D comics, and his work here is particularly apt.

None of the names have been changed, so an important historical lesson can be learned as Al Capp, William Gaines, and Fredric Wertham each play their parts on the sad stage of the birth of comics censorship.

If you wonder how the Comics Code Authority stamp first bloomed on comic books covers, Zone and Roblin will give you the answer and make you realize how easily a golden age can be snatched away. □

Things Fall Apart

Continued from page 56

problems were going to be solved. Imagine—an end to pointless bloodshed, vacations half the year, edible excrement, permanent health and vigor from flour and water, and, of course, championship soccer teams! What could be more wonderful, more incredible? The problem, however, was this: it was *too* incredible. As an acquaintance of mine said, at exactly 8:13:00, 'I don't effing believe it.' And I think he spoke for a large number of people."

The dean stared hard at the professor, not sure if he was being made fun of. "What are you trying to say?"

"Just this: people don't effing believe it any more. They have lost touch with science. They don't believe that you could possibly have solved all their problems. And, by an unfortunate coincidence in TV scheduling, a large enough number of them were made to think, all at the same time, 'I don't effing believe it.' In short, Dean, people have lost their faith in progress."

"That's ridiculous."

"Is it? Look at this list. It shows the progression of things falling apart. You will notice that it goes from the most complex to the very simple. First people lost their faith in computers, heavy-water cars, food synthesizers, mag-lev trains and the like—all very complex things, backed up by scientific theories most of them could never comprehend. But it progressed. From there it went to slightly simpler things, like synthetic clothing and gunpowder. Now it's affecting things like gravity-fed water systems. Solar power only held on so long because people can easily imagine the connection between the sun and the production of light and energy."

He held out his list, which had originally begun like this:

First Day—Complex Things:

- Mag-lev trains
- Computers
- Television

and went on as a fairly accurate chronology of things falling apart.

What it now looked like was this:

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- Μαγ–λεω τραινσ Χομπυτερσ
- Τελεϖισιον

"This is gibberish!" the dean shouted.

"Hey," a nanobiologist a few yards away called out, "my pen's stopped working!"

"Oh dear," the professor said, taking his list back and scanning it. "It seems as if even writing systems are breaking down now."

The dean, thoroughly disgusted by what he presumed to be a mad old man, accepted a clipboard from his assistant which was supposed to show him his schedule of emergency meetings for the day. However, it looked much like the professor's list, and he turned back with a bewildered air.

"But if that's the case—if people's sudden lack of faith in scientific accomplishment has ruined everything we've worked for—then what do we do?"

The professor smiled, sympathizing with the dean's distress. "I believe I have thought of an answer to that. Has anyone got a cigarette and a match?"

The assistant produced a pack and a book, to the dean's astonishment.

"We were using them in one of the experiments," the assistant said, a little sheepishly. Cigarettes had been banned entirely only a year or so earlier.

"Never mind," the professor said. "I'm glad you had them handy. Now, I need a volunteer." Sweeping the crowd of student protesters, he saw a face he recognized. "Lisa! Lisa Smithfield! Come here, dear!"

The riot police let the student through.

"Hey, Prof," she said, beaming and smacking him on the shoulder. "How are you? You know, you really shouldn't be seen in the company of these servants of fascist warmongering. Their work does nothing but produce weapons for imperialism."

"Of course, my dear. I am seeking to destroy them from within." Smithfield had been in the professor's class a year before; he was familiar with her good-natured hatred of fascist warmongering and imperialism, ideals which had recently come back into vogue and offered him many nostalgic memories. "Now, could you tell me, do you know what these are?"

He held up the cigarettes and the match.

"Sure!"

"Would you light a cigarette for me then?"

"I guess I could try," she said cheerfully, "but not even matches work any more."

"Indulge me."

She did, ripping out and trying to strike three matches in a row. Nothing happened, the matchheads rubbing off and leaving long streaks on the striking pad.

"You see, Prof? It's useless. These tools of the international bourgeoisie have failed us."

"They always do," he agreed. "Now, can you tell me how a match works?"

"Sure—you rub it on the little line there and it catches fire."

"Usually, yes, though not at the present. But why?"

After a long moment's thought, the student admitted that she did not know. The professor then asked her to rub her hands together briskly, which she did, albeit with a certain amount of reluctance.

"Do you notice how hot they get?"

"Sure."

"Now, what if your hands were something that caught fire easily? If you rubbed them hard enough and fast enough, mightn't they catch fire?"

"I suppose so."

"Good enough. Now, the material of which matchheads are composed does catch fire very easily. So when you scratch it hard

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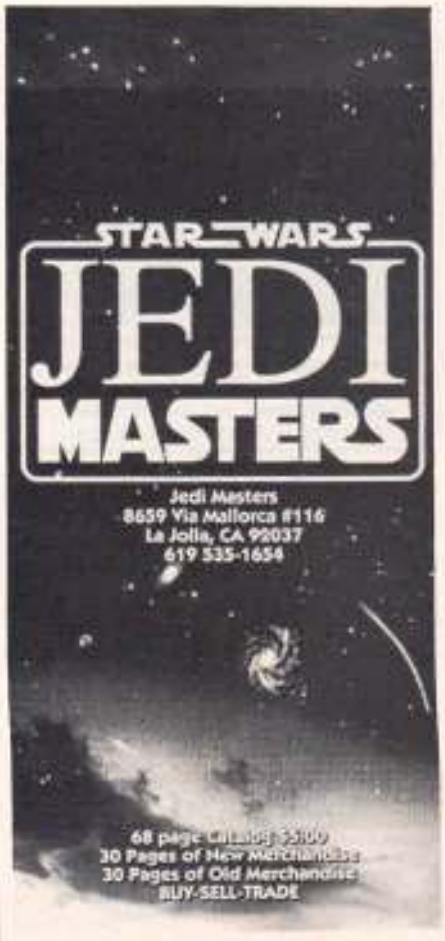

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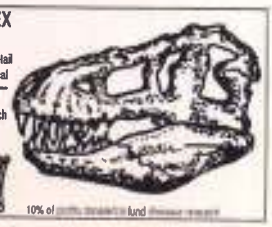

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across the little line there, it catches fire. Do you understand?"

"Sure," she said, a little disdainfully. "That's obvious."

"Of course it is. Now, do me one last favor and light me a cigarette."

She lit a match on the first strike, but the professor stopped her before she could light the cigarette, taking it gently from her hands.

"Cigarette smoking is illegal, my dear, but thank you for your help. Now," he said, turning to the astonished dean, "do you see what we're up against?"

"We haven't been able to light a match for hours!" the dean protested.

"Of course not—because no one believed you could. There was no longer any faith in the simplest of processes, because at one particular moment, almost the entire human race rejected their hitherto unqualified faith in science."

"I'm not sure that's how matches work," the dean's assistant said doubtfully.

"That doesn't matter," the professor said airily. "What matters is that people believe they work at all. Which means we have to begin, right now, explaining things to people. We have to explain everything, from the simple things like matches to complex things like nanotechnology. It will be a long, hard process—but in the end, over a period of months, or perhaps years or even decades, we will be able to restore people's faith in progress."

IN THE END, ACTUALLY, IT took less than a week. It spread from the tiny campus across the country and eventually around the world. Teams of scientists moved out, armed with matches and ballpoint pens and flush toilets, explaining the principles behind them in short, easy-to-understand sentences. And once people understood and accepted the basics, the rest fell naturally into place, and all the major achievements of science were quickly reinstated.

The professor was hailed as a hero by the scientific community, though many of his suggestions (including specifically not explaining the workings of gunpowder and the electric guitar) were not acted upon, and he was honored around the world. He was even granted an honorary Nobel Prize, the money from which he used to buy an antique house. While fitted with all the modern conveniences (including an Ultimate Recycler), it also had its own well, a root cellar and a large garden in which he grew vegetables.

"I have always been careful not to interfere with the faith of others," he would tell visitors, "but I refuse to allow their faith—or lack thereof—to interfere with me." □

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MOVIES

Continued from page 21

the shooting script.

Longo says the transition from artist to movie director has not been a difficult one. "The way I make art is not like a guy sitting in a studio drinking bourbon and crying while he paints," he says. "My work as an artist is actually a lot like making movies. I think that what was most difficult about this whole process was the perpetual, continuous cli-

Spider (Henry Rollins) puts a headlock on the Street Preacher (Dolf Lundgren).

mate in which I had to constantly be creative, be it what color was the toilet paper in the bathroom to what does the set look like. That's one thing I'm not used to because in my studio, everything ultimately comes back to me but it comes back in a sketch. Making this movie was like making art on a really huge scale: the sets were like sculptures—I had the biggest art studio in the world."

Though he plans to continue making art (his work will be showing in Germany and Japan before the film opens and then possibly in New York and L.A. at the time of release), Longo would like to continue to make films. His immediate plans, however will keep him at home. "I'm going to try to do Mr. Mom for a while and let my wife work, if she wants to," he says. "She's far better at being an actress than I am at what I do. And I want to hang around and watch the kid grow up. Being a baby is a short-term thing. I want to be around when he walks by himself for the first time."

"I joke about this, but the subtitle of this movie should be 'Trust Robert,' Longo concludes, "because all of these people trusted me enough to go along with this even though I was a first-time director. It was difficult at times to get people excited about trying to make something extraordinary. You want everyone to live and breathe the movie as much as you do, but you have to accept that people have lives. I had a lot of control for a first-time director, which was great. You figure there's around a hundred and sixty thousand single images on this film and I try to control each frame. The decision-making process is just unbelievable. It was a very complicated, unusual movie, but I think part of that had to be that way because I was the director. A conventional, normal movie would never have hired me. I'm dangerous now because I know how to do it." □

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By Adam-Troy Castro

Nuclear wars are dangerous, especially in New Jersey.

Only the strangest superheroes can defeat the wily Dr. Entropy. Art by Francesco Santalucia.

WHEN YOU FIRST ENTER THE SECRET LOW-TECH Headquarters of the Superhero League of Hoboken, it seems like a club for losers if ever there was one. The heroes you find hanging out in the lunchroom, waiting for a mission so they can rush out and fight evil, all have the kind of superpowers designed to strike boredom into the hearts of criminals. Among them are Robomop, who has the ability to clean up messes, Mademoiselle Pepperoni, who can see inside pizza boxes, and Captain Excitement, who's just superhumanly boring. Even the leader of the band, the Crimson Tape, occupies that position only because he's tremendously good at putting together organizational charts.

Normally, you wouldn't trust this band to cross the street, let alone save the world—especially the dangerous world of the barbaric, bloodthirsty, irradiated, post-holocaust future of this game—but the evil Doctor Entropy is on the loose, and these are the only folks even remotely equipped to stop him. Can the world survive? What do you think?

This is the premise of the eponymously titled *Superhero League of Hoboken* (Legend Entertainment, IBM), a flawed but frequently hilarious game designed by Steve Meretzky. It uses essentially the same format as most other computer role-playing games...except that instead of traveling through a mock-medieval landscape, hacking away at Orcs, Trolls, and other refugees from Tolkien, you wander a post-holocaust version of the tri-state area (including Long Island, New Jersey, and lower West-chester county), hacking away at the oddly mutated creatures that prowl the world after the bomb.

Strictly speaking, the role-playing aspect of this game is not substantially different from previous games of this type; the characters use weed whackers or low-intensity lasers rather than swords and crossbows, and they possess oddly conceived superpowers rather than magical spells, but let's be honest here—the mechanics are basically the same, and all that's really changed is the nomenclature. You're still buying armor and weaponry from shifty-eyed merchants at marketplaces, still trying to gain in experience and abilities so you can evolve beyond the bunch of wimps you started out to be, and still finding your way around so you can fight the tougher bad guys native to the lands farther away from home.

Fighting a monster in this game is pretty much exactly like fighting a monster in a high-fantasy quest game... *except* that you've seen most of the monsters in the high-fantasy quest game a thousand times before, and the mutants here are all bizarre visual puns designed to raise wry grins (at least the first, and not the seventeenth, time you see them). Among them are Lawyers, who do battle by issuing subpoenas; the MacMutant, who is essentially a hamburger who spews toxic special sauce; and the Screaming Meemies, who do you in by incessantly complaining. There are also killer filing cabinets known as BureauCrats, and Cruise Mistletoes and Steroid Men. One of the more unfortunate creations is the Glowing Beaneater, a fat person of indeterminate and probably irrelevant sex who attacks by lifting one leg and graphically letting the compressed intestinal gases fly. (Link that with the item of armor known as the Vomit-Proof Vest and draw your own conclusions about behavior in the Legend Entertainment company cafeteria.)

This is all fairly clever stuff, but a little of it goes a long way, and since you must travel back and forth across the same landscape in search of the items you need to win the game, a lot of it is necessarily repetitive. If your tolerance for hack-and-slash gameplay is not already a given, then the funny graphics and weird monster names won't be enough to hold your attention.

Fortunately, there's more to the game than that, since superheroes also have to run about solving mysteries, fighting crime, defeating bad guys, and generally doing good. And you can frequently consult Matilda, the computer at your Jersey City headquarters, for word on the life-or-death crises that constantly pop up in any superhero's universe.

These crises all involve problem-solving of the sort familiar to adventure gamers (i.e. finding, and then properly manipulating, the proper tools in the proper context), and though that can be deadly tedious when done wrong, these all follow the bizarre manic logic that's only to be expected from a Meretzky game.

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Meretzky is, after all, notorious for a previous game (*Leather Goddesses of Phobos*) where players had to find the proper (and fiendish) application for a device known as the Tee Remover, which was capable of turning a rabbit into a rabbi. *Superhero League of Hoboken* is filled with such insanity, ranging from the cult that worships game-show host Pat Sajak to the rival superhero group that's gotten itself hooked on girlie magazines. The game plays fair about this too; in most cases, the tools necessary for solving any individual crisis can be found reasonably close to the location of that crisis. And though the solutions are always eccentric, in one way or another (as with the evil warlord you defeat by the simple expedient of filching his toupee), it's always in a manner that doesn't emerge from somewhere in the vicinity of left field. The clues are there, if you know how to look for them, and if you can make your mind resonate as peculiarly as Meretzky's.

Legend's impressively mutated Steroid Man prowls the world after the bomb.

The missions are provided in groupings of five, all of which must be completed in order to proceed to the next level. They even have a recurring villain—the evil Doctor Entropy, who shows up once a level and resembles a jack-in-the-box crossed with the Joker. Doctor Entropy may look silly, but he's an evil dude indeed; he's constantly doing stuff like building doomsday machines and breeding pigeons with impeccable senses of aim. Like any proper comic-book villain, he always threatens to return, and he always makes good on his promise, with His Most Nefarious Scheme Yet.

Your encounters with Doctor Entropy are generally the best-choreographed and, therefore, the most exciting in the game, since whenever you stop him, it's always in the nick of time.

In any event, your enjoyment of the game will depend entirely on your personal tolerance for problem-solving and hack-and-slash gameplay. My only real problem remains conceptual: that, namely, Doctor Entropy and a few other minor (purely cosmetic) details aside, neither the majority of the puzzles nor the majority of the bad guys would have been much out of place had the characters been ordinary adventurers rather than superheroes. Superheroes are about secret identities, characters bursting through walls, operatic cries of vengeance, and pseudo-Wagnerian battles between good

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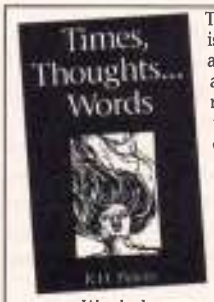

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and evil. This game could have used a little more of that. But if you like computer role-playing games, then you'll find this one great fun to play.

If nothing else, it will leave you with an entirely new respect for folks gifted at putting together really good organizational charts.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

•It is said that there is nothing as powerful as an idea whose time has come. And a new idea has indeed entered the gaming field and is threatening to revolutionize the industry. *Magic: the Gathering* did away with bulky books and replaced them with an easily portable game, using only a deck of cards, and now, another manufacturer is preparing to take the concept where no collectible card game has gone before. *Star Trek: The Next Generation Customizable Card Game*, due out this month from Decipher, Inc., transports the crew from the television screen to a pocket-sized game that brings to life all the action and adventure of battles between the crews of the U. S. S. *Enterprise*, Klingon Birds of Prey and Romulan Warbirds. Decipher knows all about creating a game-playing experience out of *Star Trek*, as they are also responsible for *How To Host a Murder Mystery*, which includes a *Trek* episode, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation Interactive Board Game*. This time, they use the *Trek* license to design 363 cards, each with an image excerpted from the video masters of the series and digitally enhanced, out of which you and your opponent will have to select individual decks of sixty cards, containing your missions, personnel, and the ships needed to accomplish them. Players move their ships and crew across a spaceline created with the mission cards they have selected. Cards, each of which will bear the designation common, uncommon, rare, or ultra-rare, will be available in randomly assorted decks of sixty and expansion sets of fifteen, and should be beaming into your local stores now.

•With the deluge of dinosaur novels and comics still coming, and *Jurassic Park* hitting a billion dollars in gross earnings, it's time to separate fact from fiction. *Smithsonian Institution Dinosaur Museum* (Software Marketing Corporation, MSRP $59.95) can turn your home into a museum, for the world's greatest museums have contributed their archives to a software package that takes you on a trip back to prehistoric times. *Dinosaur Museum* is divided into three separate rooms, each with exhibits that bring the dinosaurs back to life. The Museum Room presents both skeletons and lifelike dioramas, with information about the classification, behavior and fossil distribution of various dinosaurs. The Conservatory features exhibits on dinosaur biology, extinction theories, myths, and a Who's Who. The Game Room tests the information learned in the other rooms by challenging players with educational trivia games. □

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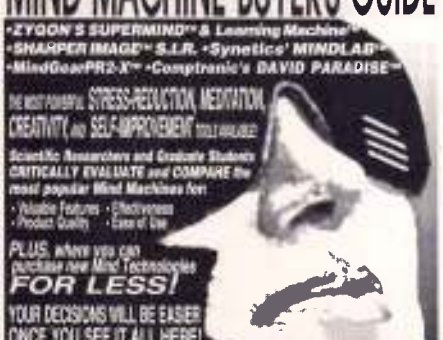
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SCIENCE

Continued from page 28

years. If you say that humans have been intelligent for even as long as three million years, it's very unlikely that somebody shows up just at this time.

ANDREWS: One of the arguments in the UFO community is that the first major sighting in this country occurred about two years after the nuclear blasts in 1945. So some people suggested that somebody could have been cruising the neighborhood, the local galactic cops could have been zoning by a light year away, and saw the flash. They could have said, "Wait, these people are violating the firearms ordinance," and just popped in to see what was happening.

SHEFFIELD: One of my favorite theories is that aliens did come a long time ago, and they decided they didn't want to talk to us until we were smart. So they put a coded message into our DNA, and when we are smart enough to read our own genetic code, we'll find a coded message in there that tells us what to do to get in touch with them. They don't have to keep coming back. All they have to do is let us reproduce from one generation to the next until the organism is smart enough to read and has the technology to read the message. We're just about at that point now. We're reading the genome. Once we sort out the introns from the exons, we'll find, lo and behold, the specifications for the starship are there, in a certain code.

And that's a very economical way of doing it. You don't have to hang around, you don't have to keep watch. You wait for people to develop, and if they never come to see you, then they never got smart. If you do that to all the life-bearing planets in your galaxy, you solve the problem. The aliens have done their job. They've made sure that anybody who does come to see them has passed the screening test.

KONDO: There are variations to your story, actually. You may speculate how we made the jump to *Homo sapiens*. It may be that alien interference caused *Homo sapiens* to be created, in which case the entire DNA may be thanks to the alien technology.

SF AGE: Which would make us the aliens. Any final words?

ANDREWS: Given an infinitely large universe, and at least ten billion years, I'm sure nature has cooked up surprising life forms. I only hope they don't believe in using pesticides on troublesome immature species like humans.

SHEFFIELD: There is a quote from the late, lamented *Pogo* that is relevant to this, in which they are sitting looking up at the stars, and one of them says, "You know, it's possible that out there may be thousands of species more intelligent than we are. On the other hand, we may be the most intelligent species in the universe. Either way, it's a mighty sobering thought." □

EXTINCT ALIENS

Continued from page 41

out loud. *'While they were totally alien physically, the Pylthothi possessed an inborn aesthetic standard almost identical to humanity's. They were nauseated by the way they looked, sickened by the way they smelled, and utterly horrified by the way they lived. Most of all, they were tormented by the ten-million-year lifespan they had to suffer through. To put it succinctly...they screamed incessantly because it was, under the circumstances, the way any reasonable creature would act.'"*

Nimmitz looked away from the screen. "Have I mentioned recently that I don't like this deal, Ernst?"

"It depends on your definition of recently. As I recall, you've been mentioning it just about hourly."

"I don't like this deal, Ernst."

"You don't like being handed a check for more money than the average annual income of some entire planetary civilizations?"

"Not until I know the catch," said Nimmitz.

"Why must there be a catch all the time? Why can't you just believe that it's a genuine charity?"

"Two reasons," said Nimmitz. "One, I've never seen any."

Vossoff blinked. "And two?"

"That smell you were complaining about?"

"Yes?"

"That really bad, acidic smell?"

"Yes?"

"The one that you're probably not sure you can stand?"

"Yes?"

"I think it's coming from us."

Vossoff started yelling.

THEY SPENT THE NEXT HALF HOUR FRANTICALLY ransacking Vossoff's cabin for the P'psian newspad, retrieving it, and searching the classifieds for the advertisement bearing the number of the Charles Darwin Clearinghouse. They spent the half-hour after that patching a call through the ship hytex, and the half-hour after that suffering through an interminable muzak rendition of a slapstick Betelgeusian operetta called "When Suns Go Pfffffft."

By the time Miss Haversham came on-screen, somehow no longer sweet and matronly, but instead cold and predatorial, her old-lady clothing now replaced by the harsh tailoring of a corporate shark, Vossoff was too livid to care. "You're in a whole lot of trouble, lady!"

"I find that hard to believe," said Miss Haversham.

"You never told us you were going to mess with our chromosomes, damn it!"

"Yes I did," Miss Haversham said coolly. "In fact, I was scrupulously careful with my language throughout the negotiation. I never said you were adopting the Pylthothi. I said that you were adopting the Pylthothi species, which is something entirely different, and which, by any literal definition, means adopting the Pylthothi genetic structure as your own. It means adopting their appearance, their smell, their natural habitat, and their way of life. It means becoming a Pylthothi. Why else did you think we were paying you so much money?"

Nimmitz clutched Vossoff's arm. "What does she mean, Ernst? Please tell me what she means."

Vossoff tried to tell him, but no words emerged.

"No need to bother," Miss Haversham said kindly. "I'll tell him myself." She addressed Nimmitz. "You know that meal you ate before departing the Clearinghouse? Specifically, the strangely disagreeable aftertaste of the garlic bread? You were both rude enough to mention it. Well, that taste was the combined chemical exhaust of literally billions of nanorobotic microsurgeons, who entered your system through the aforementioned bread and have been busily revising your genetic structure one cell at a time ever since. By now, neither one of you is quite human anymore; by the time you reach your new world, in about forty-two hours, you'll both be Pylthothi enough to be transplanted there. Our representatives have selected a wonderful little cave wall where I'm sure you'll both spend the next ten million years being very happy."

Nimmitz blinked several times in rapid succession. "But I don't WANT to be a Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss."

All Vossoff heard was the unmistakable sound of Nimmitz's very, very large anvil plummeting toward him from somewhere in the vicinity of the Charles Darwin Clearinghouse.

"The check is good," said Miss Haversham. "If you'd just searched a little more carefully through our catalogues, like most of our clients, you might even have found yourselves a relatively humanoid species capable of cashing it. Poor planning, I think. But aside from that, gentlemen...our business is done."

Vossoff found voice. "But wait—!"

She broke the connection.

Nimmitz pouted. "But I don't WANT to be a Pylthothi Screaming Stink-Moss."

Vossoff merely fainted.

IT'S NOT THE STENCH THAT GETS TO THEM. OR the tedium of being rooted to a cave wall, unable to move. Or the frequent groundquakes that once every hour or so tear through their little home like the death-throes of a dying beast. Or the constant, maddening drip-drip-drip of their acidic secretions wearing away at the rocks below. Or even the knowledge that it was their own carelessness around the finer points of contract law that got them here. No; they scream because there's a clear permaplastic acid-proof display case designed to last for eons on the cave floor between them. It has been considerately left in their presence so they can see it.

It's their check. □

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THE HERO TRAP

Continued from page 69

Behind her Claw hit the trigger on the trebuchet. The first of the big stones smashed into the center of the weakened spot and stuck there, sending waves of wall stuff rippling outward.

The Ysunaid howled, a low grinding bellow like stone moving underground. It labored furiously to fill the hole, draining substance from the corner towers, but the soap ate at it and ate at it, and the hole grew deeper and spread wider, while the towers wrinkled and sagged against the keep.

Hallah dipped down, caught up an egg, straightened, whirred the sling up to speed, and released it.

Another small boulder hit. The Ysunaid howled again, the sound higher, a touch of desperation in it. The towers collapsed on the ground, flaccid as balloons with all the air gone out of them.

She snatched another egg, tried to hit the edge of the hole; her aim was off and the soap splashed over the trebuchet stone. Frowning, she tried again. This one was a clean hit, above and to one side. She watched a moment, smiling as the soft soap oozed down, burning into the skin as it moved, then scooped up a new egg and sent it after the last, repeating this over and over until all the eggs were gone.

The fourth stone from the trebuchet burst completely through the wall and shattered several of the planes inside. The remnants of swallowed souls began to slip through the hole, flitting blips of yellow light that shimmered a moment, then vanished.

Ignoring the burning of her hands, Hallah scooped up a dollop of the remaining soap, dripped it into Claw's waterskin, slapped the stopple home and shook it to spread the soap through the water inside. She picked up Zack's waterskin and reached into the pot again.

The Ysunaid shivered and contorted itself as it tried to get away, but the sunlight nailed it in place. Stones from the trebuchet kept pounding at it, though the accuracy and force of the throw diminished each time it was used. There were still two stones left when a strut broke with a sharp crack that echoed back from the cliffs and the machine fell on its side, but the stream of escaping souls had thickened to a river, flowing out and up and melting into the air and their loss seemed more important than the blows from the missiles.

In a short while, the flow diminished to a trickle and then a few discrete flickers of light.

And then the Ysunaid collapsed into a pile of gray gelatin.

Zack took a waterskin from Hallah and waded across the creek. He went into a stamping dance as he sprayed the soapy water over the remnant of the keep. "Yah. Yah. Yah yah. Yah. Yah. Yah, yah."

Claw laughed and started his own spray-

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ing. "Looka that sucker melt. Hooo-eee, Hallah, love ya', 'ssassin. Who'd ever a thunk soap's a killer. No you don't, you cacarell, you don't catch me like that. Have a bit of soap. Ahhhh. Ooze, you sucker, roll your freggin' self outta here."

Hallah refilled the skins for them until the pot was empty, then she began hauling creek water and throwing it on the remnant of the Ysunaid. After a while she took a branch she'd cut from one of the firs and began using it as a mop while the two men brought more water.

Fog closed around them.

"Time!" Hallah yelled; she dropped the branch and went running for Spurge.

WHEN THE FOG CLEARED SHE WAS IN THE glade, a short distance from the tarn. It was night and a full moon swam through horsetail clouds.

Claw whooped. "We did it. We killed it."

Zack grunted.

Hallah looked at the reflection of the moon in the tarn, then at the silent dark forest beyond. "Anyone feel like finding out who set this trap and why?"

Claw shuddered. "All I want is to get the hell away from here. See y'll sometime." A moment later he was on the trail that led down to the Plain, his horse moving in a long lope that was not far from the edge of disaster.

Zack didn't bother with an answer. He just nudged his mount into a quick walk along the trail. He didn't look back.

Hallah sighed and looked again at the tarn. "The moon don't say and the night says no. Well, Spurge, I suppose we'll never know. Magic, *mierd*! A hot bath's all the magic I want to see now."

A rustle in the brush brought her head around, sent her hand to her belt knife.

The shaggy child Azere came round the clump of brush and stood on the edge of the tarn, her hands behind her. "My Mam says thanks, hero. She says leave it to a woman to think up something plain and simple like soap. She says you're real smart and I should take a lesson from what you did."

Hallah dismounted and led Spurge around the pool till she was looking down into the child's face. "Who's your Mam and why'd she do this?"

"She said you'd ask. She said to tell you Her We Don't Name borrowed you to us and we owe you pay."

"You didn't answer the question."

"I know." Azere set a large purse on the ground. "This is your pay. Mam said to tell you Her We Don't Name wants you to go to the Marches of..." She closed her eyes, scowled and moved her lips. "Arancia. A city called Agulaha. Bye."

A quick rustle and the child was gone.

Hallah glanced at the pool and sighed "Hero trap. Whole farkin' world's a hero trap." She tucked the purse in her depleted saddle bags, swung into the saddle, and started down the track to the Plain and the Marches of Arancia. □

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CONTRIBUTORS

ALLEN STEELE IS HARD AT WORK researching and writing his new novel, *The Light of a Rising Moon.* Due out next year from Ace, the book, according to the author, can best be described as "an alternative history techno-thriller about the U.S. space program." His novella *The Weight*, which is set on Jupiter in the far future, will be published in hardcover by Legend in January. Also be on the look-out for his short story collection *Rude Astronauts*, due out in March in its first mass market paperback edition.

Joel Naprstek is finishing up his second volume in a comic book series for Kitchen Sink on the famed World War II Flying Tigers. Other recent comics work includes a full page spread of the *X-Men* for Marvel Comics' 1995 calendar. He is a fan of pulp fiction and traces his influences to Wally Wood and the other classic EC Comics SF artists.

Lawrence Watt-Evans has written over two dozen novels and four score short stories in the fields of SF, fantasy and horror, winning one Hugo Award and two *Asimov*'s Readers' Awards.

Michael Dubisch's first illustration sale was to Fantaco's *Goreshriek* #6 in 1987. He is a graduate of the School of Visual Arts, and his cartoons have appeared in every issue of *High Times* for a number of years. Dubisch was the illustrator for the comic book *Fleshcrawlers*, which was reviewed in our November 1993 issue.

Broek Steadman seems on the verge of becoming the King of Young Adult cover art. He has contracted for twelve covers for R.L. Stine's new series *The Children of Fear Street*, and is currently working on the first volume, *The Beast 2*. He also recently completed a set of matching covers for Bruce Coville's series *The AI Gang*. Both of these will be appearing from Pocket Archway.

Daniel Hood recently sold his second novel, *Wizard's Heir*, to Ace, which will publish it in August 1995.

Pete Manison began writing science fiction twelve years ago, inspired by the works of Frank Herbert, Frederik Pohl and Arthur C. Clarke. In 1989, his story "Mothers of Chaos" won a finalist slot in the *Writers of the Future* contest, and since then, his short fiction has appeared in two *WOTF* anthologies and many magazines. He is a physical fitness enthusiast and life-long resident of Houston, Texas.

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Pete Manison

Pat Morressy

BY THE TIME YOU READ THESE WORDS, **Elizabeth Hand** will have found out whether she has won a World Fantasy Award for her nominated novella "The Erl King," which was published in *Full Spectrum 4*. Her novel *Waking the Moon* is due out shortly in England from Harper Collins. **Adam-Troy Castro** has been prolific this past year, with over two dozen short stories currently in the publication pipeline. Among those due to appear shortly are pieces in *F&SF*, *100 Vicious Little Vampires* and *South From Horror*. He is also plugging away at a first novel.

If the work of **Paul Di Filippo** begins to appear less frequently in these pages, blame it on the Internet, where he has recently taken up residence. He was born thirteen days after Elvis Presley's television debut, and his most recent sale was to the special Charles Platt-edited edition of *Interzone*.

John Kessel is co-editing an anthology for Tor titled *Fun in the Burn Ward*, which grew out of short stories from the Sycamore Hill Writers Workshop. In his attempts to finish his novel *Corrupting Dr. Nice*, Kessel has cut back on many of his writing assignments, but he did find time to act in the independent film *The Delicate Art of the Rifle*.

Over the past twenty years, **Jo Clayton** has become known primarily for her many novel series, which attempt to bring back that space opera sense of wonder. Her popular series include the *Diadem* and *Skeen* books, as well as those in the *Duel of Sorcery* and *Shadith's Quest* cycles.

Pat Morressy has been illustrating a number of books for Easton Press, including Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Fisherman of the Inland Sea* and Spider and Jean Robinson's *Starmind*. Her art has recently been appearing in planetarium shows at the Smithsonian. She is a Long Island transplant, having originally hailed from Massachusetts. **Mike Resnick** has been nominated for nine Hugo Awards since 1989, and has won twice. His newest book is *A Miracle of Rare Design*.

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